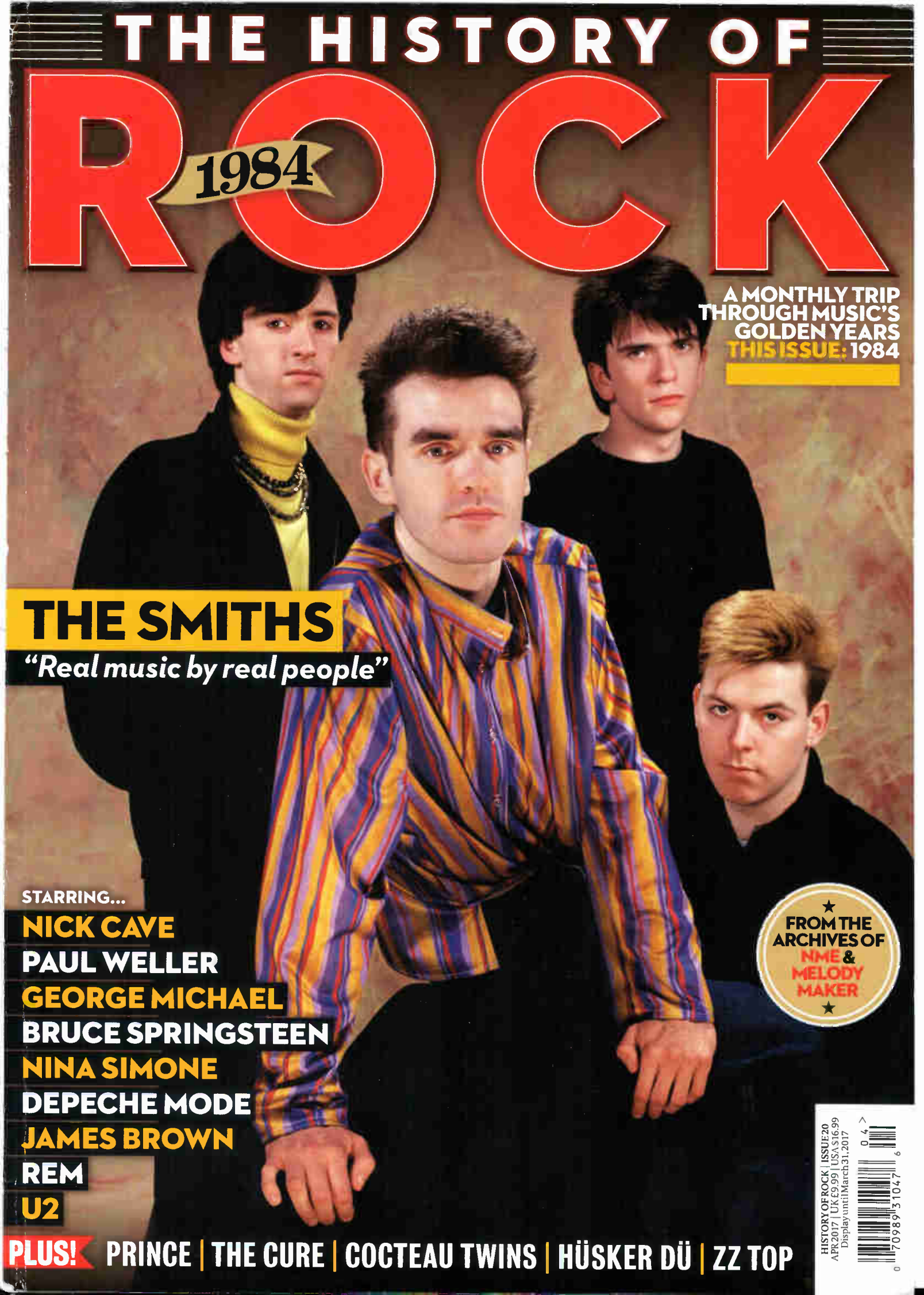
THE HISTORY OF ROCK

1984

A MONTHLY TRIP THROUGH MUSIC'S GOLDEN YEARS
THIS ISSUE: 1984



THE SMITHS

"Real music by real people"

STARRING...
NICK CAVE
PAUL WELLER
GEORGE MICHAEL
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
NINA SIMONE
DEPECHE MODE
JAMES BROWN
REM
U2

★ FROM THE ARCHIVES OF NME & MELODY MAKER ★

PLUS! PRINCE | THE CURE | COCTEAU TWINS | HÜSKER DÜ | ZZ TOP

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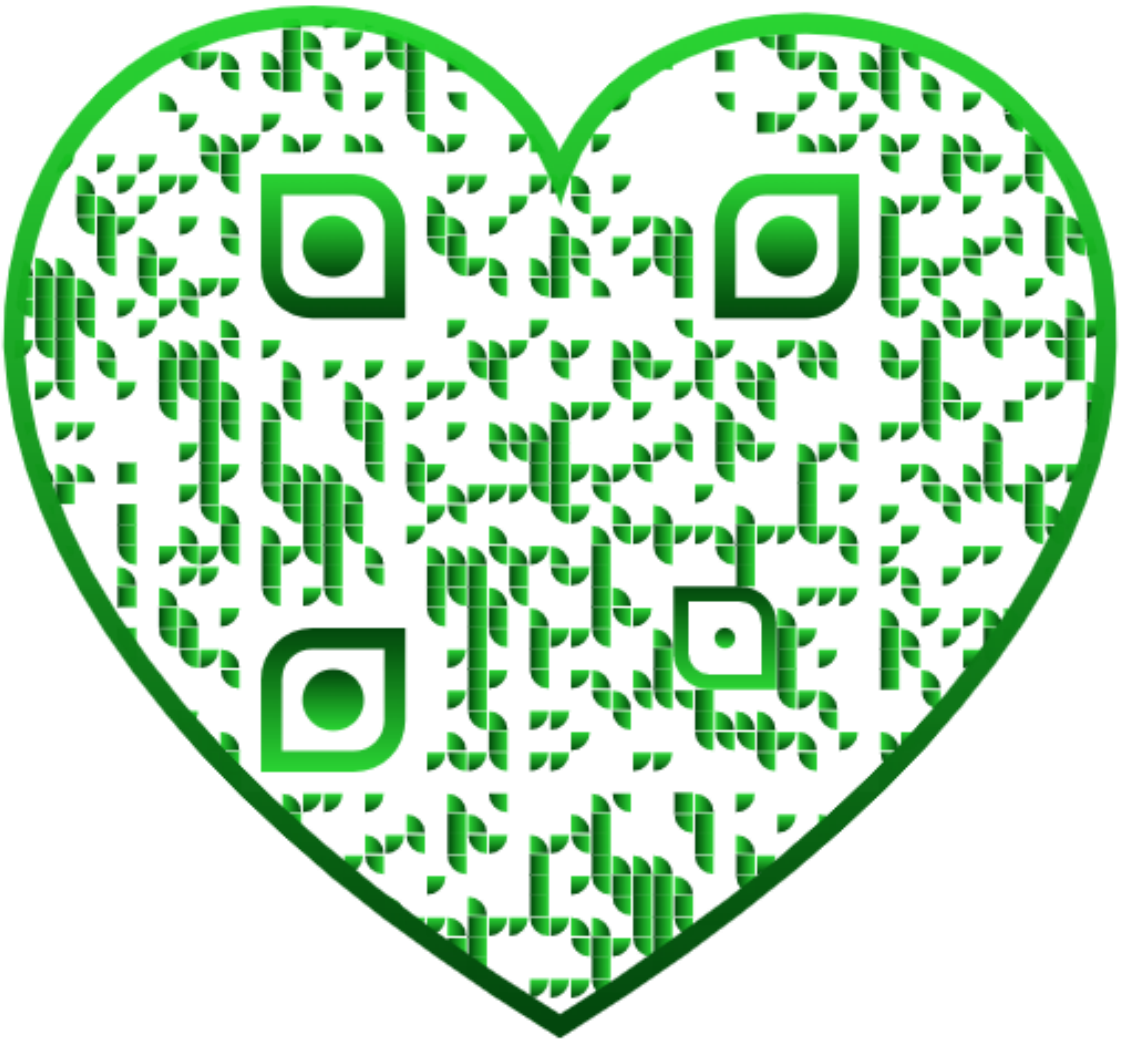

Welcome to 1984

THE 20 YEARS so far covered by *The History Of Rock* have seen action and reaction, financial successes and grassroots revolution. This year, rock remains as engaged as it needs to be during the administration of Margaret Thatcher – with its cold war, nuclear threat and high unemployment – but the movement which takes place this year is actually not aggressive in character.

More than ever, artists put their money where their mouth is to change the world for the better. In September, Paul Weller – continuing a recent philanthropic streak – and Wham! play a benefit concert for striking miners, while at the end of the year the pair join Band Aid. A collective put together by Bob Geldof and Midge Ure after viewing a news report on the Ethiopian famine, their ad hoc group of pop stars rounds off the year at the top of the charts, raising millions for charity.

Musically, meanwhile, the aggressive commerciality signalled by the rise of Duran Duran now meets its characterful reaction. The likes of REM, Lloyd Cole, Prefab Sprout and our cover stars The Smiths celebrate a renewal of guitar music. Under the radar, meanwhile, a kinship develops between Black Flag, Nick Cave and The Fall – whose work is seen as much as transgressive writing as it is music. In the US, Prince and Michael Jackson engage with huge audiences in different but no less dramatic ways.

This is the world of *The History Of Rock*, a monthly magazine which follows each turn of the rock revolution. Whether in sleazy dive or huge arena, passionate and stylish contemporary reporters were there to chronicle events. This publication reaps the benefits of their understanding for the reader decades later, one year at a time. Missed one? You can find out how to rectify that on page 144.

In the pages of this 20th edition, dedicated to 1984, you will find verbatim articles from frontline staffers, filed from the thick of the action, wherever it may be.

In a hotel room with Morrissey. Hearing Dave Lee Roth explain why Van Halen is like a tampon. And finding out that the way to George Michael's heart is through an aggressive interview.

"We didn't want to talk to *Melody Maker*, because your hypocrisy makes us sick," says George. "You use our name on the cover and then slag us off inside. We're only talking to you because we fancied doing a juicy interview for a change."

1984 MONTH BY MONTH

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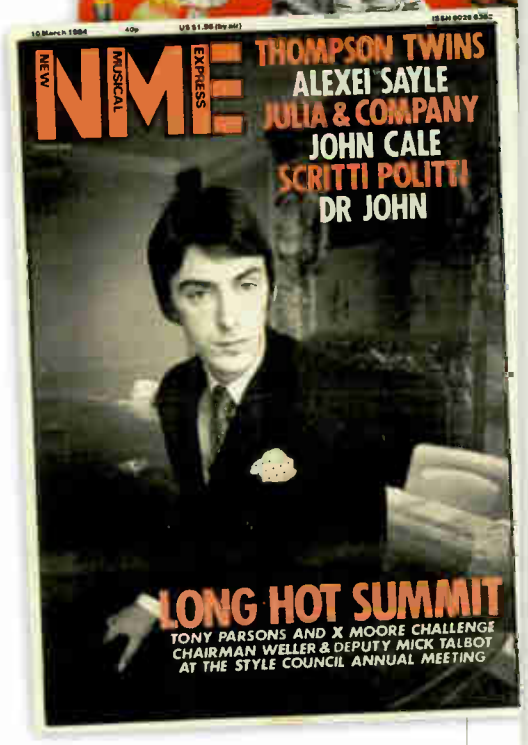

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EBET ROBERTS / GETTY

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THE HISTORY OF ROCK

Time Inc. (UK) Ltd, 3rd Floor, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark St, London SE1 0SU | **EDITOR** John Mulvey, whose favourite song from 1984 is *Part Company The Go-Betweens* **DEPUTY EDITOR** John Robinson *How Soon Is Now? by The Smiths* **ART EDITOR** Lora Findlay *Jean's Not Happening by The Pale Fountains* **PRODUCTION EDITOR** Mike Johnson *Behind The Mask by Greg Phillinganes* **ART DIRECTOR** Marc Jones *That's Livin' Alright by Joe Fagin* **DESIGNERS** Becky Redman *Let's Go Crazy by Prince* **PICTURE EDITOR** Phil King *The Greatness And Perfection Of Love by Julian Cope* **COVER PHOTO** Chalkie Davies / Getty **THANKS TO** Helen Spivak, Johnny Sharp **MARKETING** Charlotte Treadaway **SUBSCRIPTIONS** Rachel Wallace **GENERAL MANAGER** Jo Smalley **GROUP MANAGING DIRECTOR** Paul Cheal **COVERS AND TEXT PRINTED BY** Wyndeham Group | **WWW.UNCUT.CO.UK**

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recycle

ALAMY

1984

JANUARY – MARCH

DEPECHE MODE, JULIAN COPE, PREFAB SPROUT, THE SMITHS AND MORE

Michael Jackson: burnt in a freakon-set accident, but still expected to appear at the February 1984 Grammy Awards.

Scorched!

MM FEB 11 Michael Jackson sustains third-degree burns while filming a TV commercial.

THE DAY THE earth caught fire! Or at least the day Michael Jackson's hair caught fire, which amounts to the same thing. You'll have heard by now of how the svelte 25-year-old incendiary device was filming a TV advertisement for Pepsi-Cola, along with the rest of The Jackson Five, when suddenly a brace of special effects canisters exploded.

Before you could say "Grammy!", Michael had been transformed into a hideous human torch!

However, doctors examining the scorched megastar were able to calm a hysterical world by announcing that although Michael had sustained second- and third-degree burns on his scalp, he showed every sign of rapid recovery and will be able to appear at the Grammy Awards ceremony in Los Angeles on February 28.

But how could such a thing happen?

Jackson himself said later that he wanted to show the actual film of the incident from ignition to blast-off, so his fans would know "the truth" about what had happened to him.

Sure enough, footage of the spectacle was aired on NBC-TV on February 1. And since this story concerns Americans, the whiff of legal action lingers in the air.

According to sources close to the incident, the director of the commercial actually told Jackson to stand closer to the pyrotechnic apparatus after several earlier takes had been attempted.

Even more astoundingly, some berk apparently told Mike to keep dancing even after the chap had flames leaping around his ears.

KEVIN MAZUR / GETTY

Bitterly disappointed: Frankie singer Holly Johnson

"No one person can ban it"

MM JAN 28 The chart-topping "Relax" gets a rough ride at the BBC.

FRANKIE GOES TO Hollywood's controversial hit, "Relax" (which last week went to No 1 in the *MM* Top 50), has been unofficially banned by individual BBC producers. They've decided not to play it because of the sexually explicit nature of the lyrics.

One noteworthy ban has been by BBC TV's *Top Of The Pops* show, although they claim that new entries in the Top 40 gave them no space to feature the record, while Radio One DJ Mike Read started the ball rolling two weeks ago when he refused to play the record on his breakfast show.

Many Radio One and BBC TV producers have now followed suit, but according to a *Top Of The Pops* spokesperson, the track has not received a complete BBC ban. "There's no one person at the BBC who can ban this record," said the spokesperson. "Individual producers make up their own minds. *Top Of The Pops* featured the record as it came into the chart, but two weeks ago – when it was at No 2 – there was so much new material in the Top 40 that there wasn't space to include it."

"There was so much new material in the Top 40 that there wasn't space to include it"

Whether the record will be featured on *Top Of The Pops* this week is open to debate. "Until we get the official Gallup chart we can't say," said the spokesperson. "We don't predict things in this business."

Frankie themselves are bitterly disappointed that they did not appear on *Top Of The Pops* last week. The band were unavailable for comment as we closed for press.

DAVID REDFERN / GETTY

International controversy

MM FEB 4 A faked tape of Thatcher and Reagan is traced back to Crass.

ANARCHIST PUNK BAND Crass are at the centre of an international controversy over a fake telephone conversation between Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. The group made a tape of the "conversation" by piecing together excerpts from various broadcast speeches by Thatcher and Reagan, then sent copies of the tape to a number of European newspapers and agencies.

Crass say that while the telephone conversation was a fake, its contents contained certain truths that the group felt should be investigated and publicised. In America, newspapers said the tape was probably manufactured by the KGB for propaganda purposes – an idea repeated here in *The Sunday Times* this month.

Finally, *The Observer* traced the tape recording back to Crass. And the group spent several days in London last week making live broadcasts to American television, explaining their reasons for making the recording.

The alleged conversation covers various aspects of Falklands war strategy and nuclear policy. In an apparent discussion of the sinking of the Belgrano, Mrs Thatcher is heard to say: "Argentina was the invader! Force has been used. It's been used now, punishing them as quickly as possible."

To which Reagan ostensibly replies: "Oh, God, it's not right. You caused the Sheffield to have been hit. Those missiles we followed on screens. You must have too, and not let them know. What do you hope to gain?"

Mrs Thatcher: "What I said before – Andrew."

Crass say: "The Sheffield was used as a decoy for the Exocet which was really going for the Invincible – and that's because Prince Andrew was on board."

Later in the tape, Reagan is heard to say: "In conflict, we will launch missiles on allies for effective limitation of the Soviet Union. If any country of ours endangered the position, we might bomb the problem area and correct the imbalance, it will convince the Soviets to listen. We demonstrate our strength... the Soviets have little incentive to launch an attack."

In a statement explaining their motives for making the tape, Crass say: "In the wake of the total press censorship of the national papers during the Falklands War, and the resulting surge of rank nationalism cultivated and carried through to the general election, Crass felt that the ordinary people were being hoodwinked about the Government's behaviour before, during and after the war."

PUNK BAND MAKE A CRASS STATEMENT

ANARCHIST punk band ... apparent discussion of the ... Crass say "The Sheffield ... launch an ...

"Excited by destruction"

NME JAN 14 Einstürzende Neubaten nearly bring the house down at the ICA.

THE ICA, LONDON'S longest running home for performance extremists had its sympathies for outré art severely tested last week when a special presentation by members of Berlin's Einstürzende Neubauten and London pop group The Bic physically attacked the foundations of the building and brought the audience to near riot.

The presentation, called *Concerto For Machinery And Voice*, was a one-off arrangement for concrete mixers, chainsaw, concrete pounders, cement breakers, pneumatic drills and Fad Gadget's vocal. It crescendoed to a noisy climax which featured various members attempting to drill or break their way through the stage, the crowd throwing parts of the PA into the path of destruction and ICA staff trying to maintain order. When the latter brought the concerto to a premature close, a hard-core of 30 or so spectators refused to leave the hall. To persuade the "band" to continue they hurled debris at the back of the stage and staff clearing the hall. Damage to bodies and the building was, surprisingly, minimal.

From the performers' point of view things started to go wrong when a pounding machine malfunctioned, throwing the arrangement out, says co-arranger and conductor Martin Scheiler, of The Bic.

"Once it started to go wrong, rationale went out of the window. After the breakdown we decided to try and get down below stage. We'd heard that there were tunnels from [nearby] Whitehall and the Palace running underneath the stage and had half an aim of getting to them. But the stage was reinforced. We decided to stop when it looked like someone might get hurt."

January 3, 1984: Einstürzende Neubaten's show at the ICA in London

For their part, the ICA expected a certain amount of damage. "Nothing really happened that we had not anticipated in booking a band like this and providing them with the equipment that we did," says ICA music programmer Michael Morris. "The noise and smoke in fact made the amount of damage seem a great deal worse. It was quite small."

About the performance itself, he says: "Quite frankly, I was disappointed; I hoped it would be more structured. I felt it lacked organisation. It struck me as being demolition without commitment."

Did it ever look like things were getting out of hand?

"Well, I think human nature tends to be excited by destruction... the audience would have liked to see the whole thing go a lot further. It left the band in an awkward position as I don't think they wanted to be seen to back out of going the whole way. On the other hand they were liable for any damage and I think they were rather relieved to get off." The final result; the band got paid, the ICA got the insurance and the Big Brother week carried on as announced. A draw? *Chris Bohn*

"Without Alexis, no Stones"

MM JAN 14 RIP, blues patron and broadcaster Alexis Korner.

SINGER, BROADCASTER AND blues authority Alexis Korner, 55, died on New Year's Day. He'd been suffering from lung cancer for some time, but had continued to present his weekly Radio One show on Sunday evenings until being admitted to hospital a couple of months ago.

Tributes to Korner – instantly identifiable by his deep, growling voice – have flooded in, including one from Bill Wyman, who said that "without Alexis there would have been no Rolling Stones". For Korner acted as catalyst for many of the bands who came to prominence during the R&B boom in the early '60s, among them the Stones.

He gave Mick Jagger his first job, paying him 30 shillings a week to sing with his band Blues Incorporated, a group that also featured Charlie Watts, Brian Jones and Keith Richards. When Jagger linked up with Brian Jones to form the Rolling Stones, Korner gave them a big break by giving them a spot at the Marquee where he had residency.

His influence on the Stones and other bands like The Yardbirds, The Animals and Manfred Mann (all indirectly inspired by Korner's famous Ealing R'n'B Club) gained Alexis his reputation as "the father of British R'n'B".

Yet Korner himself, who readily acknowledged his own limitations as a singer and guitarist, never achieved huge commercial success in his own right. At one time he actively shunned it, critical of the way the music of people like Muddy Waters and Sonny Boy Williamson was being watered down for purely commercial purposes, though he always remained a big supporter of the Stones (he was widely tipped to join them when Brian Jones and later Mick Taylor left).

His 50th birthday party inspired a famous jam session

He was born in Paris of an Austrian father and a Greek-Turkish mother and the family moved to London in the mid-'30s. After school he joined Chris Barber's Jazz Band. It was Barber who initially fuelled his obsession with blues, and with harmonica player Cyril Davies he formed Blues Incorporated. His only real commercial success in his own right didn't occur until 1970, however, following an unlikely alliance with Mickey Most. Most persuaded him to front a new studio band, CCS, who enjoyed several hits, most notably "Tap Turns On The Water".

He rarely appeared live, though, and later his distinctive growl was used more as a voiceover for TV commercials than singing the blues.

Gradually he emerged as a highly respected radio personality; his extraordinarily diverse musical tastes made his Radio One show an unpredictable and a rare alternative to the station's unrelenting devotion to chart fodder.

He remained a legend among his peers. His 50th birthday party held at Pinewood Studios inspired a famous night and a jam session that involved Eric Clapton, Paul Jones, Zoot Money, Chris Farlowe, Ronnie Lane and John Surman.

His last major public appearance was at last summer's Cambridge Folk Festival, when he presided at such a celebratory session of white blues that he talked enthusiastically of doing more live work. Sadly, what should have been a rebirth turned out to be a swansong.

Alexis Korner: "the father of British R'n'B"

KIRSTIN RODGERS / GETTY, DEZO HOFFMANN / REX FEATURES

Nina Simone: threatened with a writ from Charly Records

"Uninformed remarks"

NME JAN 28 Nina Simone proves too outspoken for her own good.

LAST FRIDAY WAS not a good day for Miss Nina Simone. Having arrived at Ronnie Scott's to conclude her two-week engagement there – a stint that has proved both intriguing and successful – she was handed a letter from Charly Records threatening to sue her for slander.

The trouble stemmed from her appearance on last Tuesday's *Black On Black* on Channel 4, where during an interview with presenter Pauline Black, Nina stated she had received no royalties from the Charly Records recent reissue of her 1957 classic "My Baby Just Cares For Me" and its accompanying album.

Charly responded with a detailed three-page letter explaining that the royalties owed her had been accounted to International Jazz Emporium, who are the present owners of the Bethlehem catalogue, the company for whom Nina had originally recorded the material.

Offended by what they termed as Nina's "ill-chosen and uninformed remarks", Charly demanded a public apology within 48 hours on Channel 4 or they would be forced to sue her and LWT for slander. They also invited the songstress to inspect their books.

By Monday morning the dust had settled. Prior to leaving for Paris, Miss Simone's manager and brother issued the following statement: "As far as Miss Simone and myself are concerned the matter is closed to the public and is being dealt with in a private and affectionate manner between ourselves and Charly Records.

"The matter is being dealt with in a private and affectionate manner"

"A letter of apology has been sent and received cordially by Charly and we have no intention of embarrassing ourselves or Charly by making the matter public."

Charly for their part were satisfied with the letter they received and were currently waiting for *Black On Black* to confirm the public apology they were due to make.

Charly records have now sold over 40,000 copies of "My Baby" and a further 14,000 copies of the corresponding LP.

DAVID CORIO / GETTY

"Not everybody is a Dire Straits fan"

MM JAN 7 With a poor range available, the public proves reluctant to buy compact discs.

NINE MONTHS AFTER the introduction of compact discs to the UK, high street stores have revealed that sales of the new system are remarkably small. But the message from the shops is clear – the public will readily buy CD if the prices of the discs and players are reduced and if the availability and range of titles are increased.

"Compared to normal records, the sales of CD are quite insignificant," says Douglas Coates, marketing manager of HMV Records. "They're only about one to three per cent of total record sales. Until the players come down in price, the discs themselves won't sell."

"Availability is the worst problem," says Liz Farrow, assistant manageress at Virgin's Megastore in Oxford Street. We get people coming in every week asking for Michael Jackson's *Thriller* on compact, and if I'd had it in constantly since its release, I could have sold more copies of it than my highest seller: *Love Over Gold* by Dire Straits."

Both stores feel that the new system – superior-quality five-inch encoded discs which revolve at high speed and are tracked by laser – will be a developing market in 1984, provided the range is increased. "We need more rock and pop titles," says Liz Farrow. "Not everybody is a Dire Straits or Fleetwood Mac fan."

At the moment both stores report that 50 per cent of their CD sales are classical, probably because early buyers of the system are hi-fi buffs who traditionally leave pop for the youngsters. "In the pop field it's the AOR pop stuff that's selling," says Douglas Coates. "Dire Straits, Roxy Music and Genesis. These artists sell much better than young pop bands like Culture Club." Both HMV and Virgin feel that this could all change if the prices come down.

The limited availability of the discs and lack of titles is due to insufficient production by the pressing factories. "Manufacturing is so limited," says Tony Stratton-Smith, boss of Charisma Records, who have top-selling CD artists Genesis and Peter Gabriel. "If I wanted two or three new titles on CD I would have to wait six months for the factory time."

There's good news from Sony, however. Production is being stepped up at all of their five Japanese pressing plants and two new British firms have signed deals to manufacture the discs. And there's a whole range of new titles promised from various labels – A&M and Arista are to put out CDs by The Police, Joe Jackson, Styx and Supertramp, new EMI offerings include Bowie's *Let's Dance* and Thomas Dolby's *The Golden Age Of Wireless*, and RCA are about to release 60 Elvis Presley tracks on a CD compilation.

"Compact disc is going to be very important," says Tony Stratton-Smith. "The real fan will use CD first and cassettes second. The traditional 12-inch 33rpm LP is definitely on the way out."

Hüsker Dü: (l-r) Greg Norton, Grant Hart and Bob Mould

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A CONSUMER

HOLLY JOHNSON

NME JAN 14

The Frankie frontman's potpourri.

Human beings that have had an effect on you

Andy Warhol, Irma Grese, Kubla Khan, The Wooden Top Manipulators, Mum and Dad, the scriptwriters of *Trumpton*

Users of subliminal advertising – beware

BBC1, *NME*, Ian Levine

Those with soul

Stevie Wonder, George Clinton (Free Your Mind, Your Ass Will Follow – The Kingdom Of Heaven Is Within), Etta James, Lionel Richie even, Enid Blyton, Ken Livingstone, Peter Tatchell

Body products

Roger & Gallet jasmine soap rubbed on by anyone at hand with a natural sponge, Crisco cooking oil, a selection of sexual deviant toys – give 'em what they desire.

Music

Vangelis, Van Morrison, Jim Morrison, Gwen Guthrie, Edith Piaf, Joni Mitchell, Grace – she's the place – Jones, Peech Boys, Buddy Mate, Motörhead, Yma Sumac, T Rex

Writers off the wall

HATE: Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg
LOVE: 2,000 *AD* and The Mighty Tharg. Frank Herbert – *The Dune Trilogy* (but it's a shame that Sting got stung first). Jean Genet (of course), Salinger and Barbara Cartland

Smells

Polo, Grey Flannel, Opium (ooops – Mum's), Nasher's socks

Plebs

Anyone who moans constantly

Advice

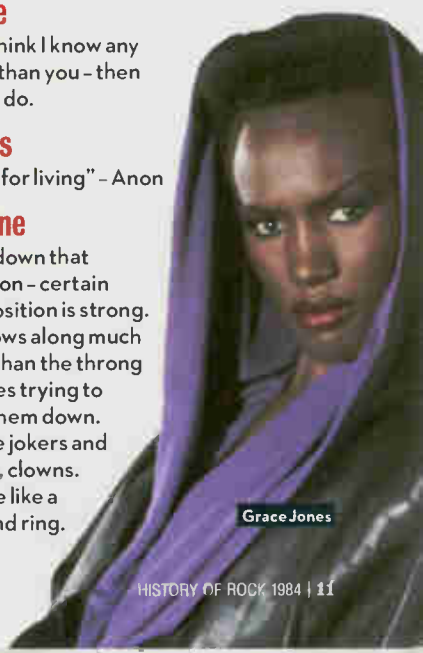
If you think I know any better than you – then I surely do.

Quotes

"Life is for living" – Anon

Exit line

Break down that inhibition – certain your position is strong. And flows along much faster than the throng of voices trying to bring them down. They're jokers and clowns, clowns. Live life like a diamond ring.



Grace Jones

LISA HAUN / GETTY, KEITH HAMSHERE / GETTY

The fastest group on Earth

NME JAN 14 "The Blue Cheer of the fast lane". Introducing, from Minneapolis... Hüsker Dü.

HÜSKER DÜ, SIGNED to Black Flag's SST label, are one of America's mightiest hardcore trios. From Minneapolis, aching heart of the Midwest, they've sent out some powerful signals of distress.

There was a single, "Statues/Amusement", in 1980, described by some as "Fallish". There was a completely crazed live album (*Land Speed Record*) which could've been *The Who Live At Leeds* fed through an Inquisition mangle, then chainsawed into a blurred blizzard of splinters and filings. (Noise reprise, pt 10). There was "In a Free Land", an interesting mid-'82 EP that balanced fast 'n' slow, hard 'n' soft, and there was an album last year called *Everything Falls Apart* (title track a solid-gold classic).

But the best of their hundred or so songs seem to have ended up on the current "Metal Circus" EP, which is simultaneously torrential and harmonic. Three-part hardcore? Mat Snow has already determined that "Diane" is the year's only true love song, and "Real World" reminds me a lot of Stiff Little Fingers, although Bob Mould and Greg Norton of the three Dü's maintain the song is simply their equivalent of "She Said, She Said". I dunno, these lumberjack-shirted punk types...

The title *Metal Circus* would suggest Duchamp or Glenn Branca or something, but this is gleamingly hard stuff. Bob Mould's guitar is like the best of Geordie and tracks like "Out On A Limb" are metallic weldings of Killing Joke and Sex Pistols.

But if Hüsker Dü – Swedish for "Do You Remember?" and the name of a famous board game – are the Blue Cheer of the fast lane, they don't plan on being just another thrash in the pan. That said, they once clocked up 360bpm for "Bricklayer" and could justifiably have claimed to be the fastest group on Earth.

"The longer we played, the faster it got. We just couldn't have taken that any further"

"Four-and-a-half years ago, that was the stuff we were writing," explains Mr Mould. "We toured two-and-a-half months, and the longer we played, the faster it got. We just couldn't have taken that any further."

Today they see no harm in adding a little mellow melody: "If your lyrics are important to you, you want them to be heard. Also, it's actually harder to play slow!"

Chimes in bassist Greg Norton: "I don't tend to walk down the street whistling hardcore."

Bob: "We wanna be able to reach anyone that'll listen to us, as we feel we have something to say to anybody, though people who are really into fashion might not like us."

Hüsker Dü's lyrics are droll: the band is pretty sceptical about rock'n'roll being a force for political change. "Movements aren't the solution," says Mould; "no one's come up with anything that caught my attention or made me want to do anything."

In his spare time, Bob gives guitar lessons. April promises another Dü album, by the name of *Zen Arcade*, and they may be supporting Black Flag's forthcoming Euro-jaunt. In the meantime you should check this wild and melodic music. Inside the metal circus, Hüsker Dü are iron tamers.

Barney Hoskyns

"I try to be positive"

A joker between songs, BILLY BRAGG's urgent social realism is a riposte to the victory of style over substance. "I thought, 'Is no one going to play what I want to hear? It's going to have to be me,' he says. "I thought there'd be people all over the country saying this, but apparently not."

— NME JANUARY 14 —

AFTER NEARLY TWO years of playing the relentless troubadour all around this curious, fragmented isle, Billy Bragg and his guitar are starting to get noticed.

The first week of 1984 has underlined that, with his showcase at the ICA Rock Week eliciting an enthusiastic response, as has his David Jensen session, and the dailies are starting to take an interest (led by the unlikely *Daily Telegraph*).

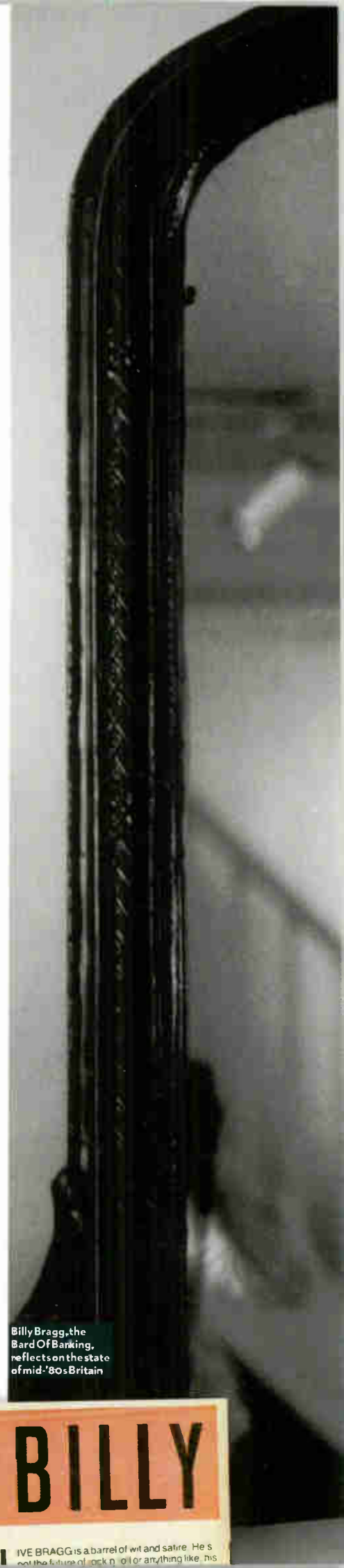
Perhaps this is partly due to the success of his mini album *Life's A Riot With Spy Vs Spy* in the end-of-year polls. A track thereof – "New England" – reached No 7 in Peel's Festive 50. But, as well as featuring in other music press polls, in the one that really matters, the one that has publicists and press officers dishing out unthinkable gifts and bribes, he was up there with Waits and Costello at No 3. Twenty-five minutes of stuttering firepower and comic bathos; songs of love, longing and anger, roughshod soulpower and manic intensity.

So, Mr Bragg, are you that important?

"No, I'm definitely not that important, and a lot of those records were LPs that I really admire as well. *Spy Vs Spy* was three afternoons' work, and the purpose I wanted it to serve when it was recorded was to give me something to sell at gigs. As long as I'm not expected to live up to that acclaim I'll be happy.

"My reputation as far as I'm concerned is based on what I do live. So as long as I keep playing I will know at any given time how good or how crap I am – I don't need polls to tell me. The *NME* poll was a very long list and looking down it was like looking down from the top of a block of flats – fuckin' hell, y'know."

Spy Vs Spy provided a glimpse of contemporary Britain, a collection of sepia-tinted postcards from the declining suburbs of the early '80s. A fervent and earnest sort of white soul music.



ZBYSIU RODAK

Billy Bragg, the Bard Of Barking, reflects on the state of mid-'80s Britain

BIG BEN VS LITTLE BILLY

laughter. But I don't talk to Sun reporters — well

IVE BRAGG is a barrel of wit and satire. He s
out the future of rock n' roll or anything like this

BARD

1984

JANUARY – MARCH

Braggin the studio: "I'm la gmy guitar percussi ely and relying o for the melody"

"By the end of the three days I was really exhausted. My fingers were sore, my voice had gone and I was physically drained. It was from midday to 10 each day continually playing the songs as powerfully as I could, recording everything and picking out the best.

"Speed? No, I never touch drugs, I get off on adrenalin. That's the most important thing to me. I play fast when I get hyped up. I still don't think 'New England' is particularly good on the LP. I can certainly play it better now. It surprises me that people see so much in them actually, they're only seven songs."

IT IS THE day after Bragg's appearance with The Redskins at the ICA and he and I are seated at a Barratt table, in a Barratt bedsit, which is part of a Barratt block in a Barratt estate in Acton. Although not actually his own place, lifelong friend Wiggy (and he'll show you pictures of them alongside each other in prams in Barking municipal park circa 1961 – just to prove that they really are "lifelong" friends) allows him to use it when he's resting up between gigs.

A bit like Bragg's music, the place is sparse and functional – no TV or record player, just a Walkman wired up to two speakers and a collection of tapes to play. There's a few books and letters from friendly, enquiring fans to be answered, but most of his possessions are back in Barking at his mum's place.

Steven William Bragg was born 26 years ago in Barking, East London. A freewheeling, eligible Sagittarian, in conversation he's sharp and to the point, modest to the point of self-deprecation, and when he gets particularly animated jumps from one base to another without prompting. From his distant youth he can remember a community spirit in Barking, but it soon faded: "Those towns were a nice idea when they were built in 1900, but by the '60s they'd started putting up all those blocks of flats."

Bragg left school at 16 for a succession of poxy jobs and – just like it said in the song – time off would be spent upstairs in the bedroom annoying the neighbours with his punk rock electric guitar.

"At school I used to knock around with the guys who had all the birds and wonder about it, which is probably why, when they all went off and got married, had kids and bought Cortinas, I went off to learn to play the guitar. I was a bit of a joker at school – they'd put me on the coach to tell jokes with the football team and if I was lucky I'd get a match.

"It definitely puts something into you; you end up thinking, 'Fuck you lot, I've got something to prove.' It probably doesn't mean that much now, but if I think back to what made me want to do this in the first place. That was the reason. 'Cos I've wanted to do this for years, play gigs, do this as a living."

A variety of groups followed, the most notable being Riff Raff, born out of "the cleansing fire" of punk.

"The spirit of '77 is a bit of a cliche, but it's not just the spirit of '77, it's '84 and '85, it's '82 and '83 as well – you don't just go through it and forget it. Seeing The Clash at the Rainbow was like – click! – my whole idea about rock 'n' roll and the Rolling Stones changed overnight. I haven't seen anything since to make me go the other way. I may be a blind fool, but I still believe all that."

Riff Raff reached an impasse, disintegrated and Bragg was left at a loose end. Unable to muster the bottle to start playing solo, he did a strange thing – he joined the army. Now I know that, aside from the usual bonehead contingent, there are guys in "the professionals" who are there out of sheer desperation, but surely someone who'd been involved with the headstrong individualism and anti-militarism of punk should have known better?

"It was a strange thing to do – *Armed Forces* has even got 'Don't Join' on the cover, and I loved that record. I think I felt that all that had failed me, so fuck it, let's see what the other side has to offer, take it to the other extreme. It was certainly the other extreme; going to Catterick was the other extreme to anything I'd ever lived like. I more or less did the whole thing just looking at it. You get 90 days to make up your mind. I knew in the back of my mind I'd never be a soldier, but I wanted to find out more about it, find out what makes people want to do it."

Sure enough, there was the bonehead contingent.

"The guys you go down with on the train are normal geezers, but a week later you realise that there's something different to this guy than a new haircut, something else has happened to them. You talk to them at dinner and (*raps forehead*) you wonder if there's anybody in there. By the time the riots came they were straining at the leash, going spare, just dying to get to Brixton and bust a few skulls.

"The whole thing is based on everything you hate most about rugby clubs. There's so many people above you and they all tell you you're shit, and you believe them. At the end of it I came back and knew what I wanted to do, it cleared my head. Before, I was just passing through time."

While readily admitting that 90 days' training doesn't give him the right to pen an LP full of soldier songs, it is an experience that helped in penning the present standout in his set, the corrosive, anguished "Island Of No Return".

"That came mostly from the stuff I got from newspapers about the Falklands. Some of it, like digging in, well I know what it's like to sit in a foxhole all night, and it must be terrible to do it with people trying to kill you, because it gets scary enough on exercise.

"The lines *'I can take the killing/I can take the slaughter/But I don't talk to Sun reporters"* – well to have gone out there and been involved in the sharp end of it all and come home to find *The Sun* trivialising it to 'Gotcha'... I know for a fact it makes a lot of the soldiers angry."

Back from the army, Bragg got a job in a friend's second-hand record shop. Hearing music, starkly, dynamically played and presented, he realised that perhaps the songs he'd been writing weren't lost for good.

"There are limitations on every musical instrument, but they are the limitations of the people that play them, not the instrument. Like two guitar, bass and drums can't only 'go so far', it's just a case of rethinking it."

So, disillusioned by the predictability of punk, Bragg drew on other, fundamental sources.

"If you listen to the old blues stuff, they're just whacking out pure rhythm on the guitar. I don't want to give the impression that I just listened to heavy-duty blues all day; I collected anything and consequently I've got loads of Beethoven albums, Lowell George – anything I could get my hands on.

"But there was something about early Muddy Waters and John Lee Hooker; it was incredibly powerful stuff, it was certainly influential. Not that I'm in any way a blues singer, but you hear that sort of thing and you know that there must be something in doing it solo. These guys have a lot

more hold over your emotions – you feel you have to listen, it's just there whacking you on the back of the head. You're compelled to listen.

"You must draw on the musical past, you can't just spring out of nowhere unless you're Einstürzende Neubaten. Having said that, probably by the time this is printed someone will have appeared on the music scene who wipes everything in the last 30 years away."

LIVE, BRAGG IS a barrel of wit and satire. He's not the future of rock'n'roll or anything like; his strength is in his unaffected repartee with the audience, his fallibility and shortcomings an acceptable part of the package.

From a starting position way back in the field he fires past the notion of cheeky cockney agit-popper and musters an autonomous drive and frenzy. He makes the bridge between rant and primal rock power, and suddenly, in the middle of one of his songs of vehemence and insight, he has you impaled on a dynamic burst, caught in a frozen moment. Looked at objectively, it never ceases to amaze me how he does it.

"When you're playing you know what lines you want people to hear, when you want the music to stop dead or build up to a certain pitch. Basically I'm putting out the rhythm of the guitar – playing it percussively and relying on my vocals for the melody. I think a lot about the songs; lots of bands play a song one way and play it that way no matter what or where they're playing. When I go to a gig I try and suss out the audience. By the time you've done three songs you know if they're in the mood to be talked to or whether they'll go for your throat."

In the present climate where pompous Kay catalogue neo-Tory mannequins lord over what Morley has already pinpointed as the "drawn-out death of the pop group", a portion of Bragg's appeal must be that he is a normal biting back – without the usual recourse to drudgery and monotony.

"I can remember seeing Spandau Ballet playing 'Chant' on *TOTP* and thinking, 'Is this the way it's going to be? It's getting late – is no one going to play what I want to hear? It's going to have to be me.' I always thought there'd be people all over the country saying this to themselves, but apparently not.

"I remember the kilts and everything, it was going back the way I didn't want it to go. The remystification of making music was setting in as well, that you could only do it in a studio with lots of money, lots of gadgets and a big name producer. And that is a patent lie."

In Bragg's world there are girls with unwanted or unplanned pregnancies, boys who were once top of their class now top of the scrapheap, wanton violence in the streets, a future only for "the chosen few". The only solace seems to be in a sentimental notion of love lost or unrequited. Hardly an encouraging picture.

"I try to be positive. But this is Britain and I'm afraid it isn't all 'Karma Chameleon' and happy happy. I don't think people need reality slammed down their throats, but it doesn't hurt to remind people who, for whatever reasons, are not aware we're living in a country where we're not looking after everybody. We all say our priority is the welfare state, but it doesn't even work any more and the government is trying to pull it apart.

"These are the things that matter to me; it doesn't really matter if the revolution comes or not. As far as I'm concerned there is a revolution happening right now and it's a right-wing revolution. Whatever little I can do to slow that down, I will."

Do you see anything to be optimistic about? "Well, I think we might just qualify for the next World Cup... Nah, I do. I never meet anyone who'll admit to voting for Thatcher; I know they all did, but it's a start. I still believe we can change the country through the ballot box – if Labour can get the youth vote. I think it's a fuckin' crime that more first-time voters went for the Tories rather than Labour last time.

"I certainly don't sit around all day reading the newspapers and thinking, 'Oh God, oh no, it's the end of the world. If the bomb goes off, then the bomb goes off, but as long as those women are at Greenham Common I feel optimistic that it won't.

"I mean there was even a housewife the other day on Capital doing their wacky 'Spot The Record' quiz and she dedicated the whole thing to them. If you can bring together that sort of thing at gigs, it's worth something. Like what the fuck happened to Rock Against Racism? I remember going to their gigs."

Bragg the songwriter is a cunning wordsmith matching commonsense socialism with an almost incurable romanticism. At its best – "New England", "This Guitar Says Sorry", "Love Gets Dangerous" – he avoids polemic and self-indulgences, but sometimes the latter strain rises to the fore and, as with his most recently aired song, "Saturday Boy", it can be slushy and embarrassing.

"That's why I failed all my O-levels – the Monday I started them I was madly in love, oh God how I was in love. The girl still turns up in my dreams. I suppose the further away in time it gets, the more beautiful she'll become to me. If I met her today she'd probably be a terrible disappointment. The girl I loved probably doesn't exist any more."

At the ICA the other night I saw him exchange a few words with longtime fave rave Elvis Costello. Does he feel on a par with people like that?

"To have to think of myself in competition with Elvis wouldn't do me any good at all. Consequently I spend all my spare time saying Elvis has gone downhill, trying to bring him down to my size. But I don't even think about it because I saw him before Christmas and I really enjoyed it – two-and-a-half hours of that was unbeatable."

So you're still conscious of your shortcomings, the need to improve your voice?

"Yes, I listen to tapes and I'm sure I'm singing flat on all the songs. I want to sing like I talk, so I'm never going to be a great singer. I don't think I have to sing in tune all the time for the lyrics to come across. It would be nice, but it comes behind a few other priorities. It's like what you wear on stage – what does it fuckin' matter?"

> "Britain isn't all 'Karma Chameleon' and happy happy"

Plans for the rest of the year – he wants to go to Europe and eventually America, "then we'll see how much I rely on the patter". Another LP in the same vein as *Spy Vs Spy* is planned; in the meantime he urges hungry fans to tape from the radio and turns a blind eye to bootleggers. Not that Bragg and only his guitar for accompaniment is a permanent thing.

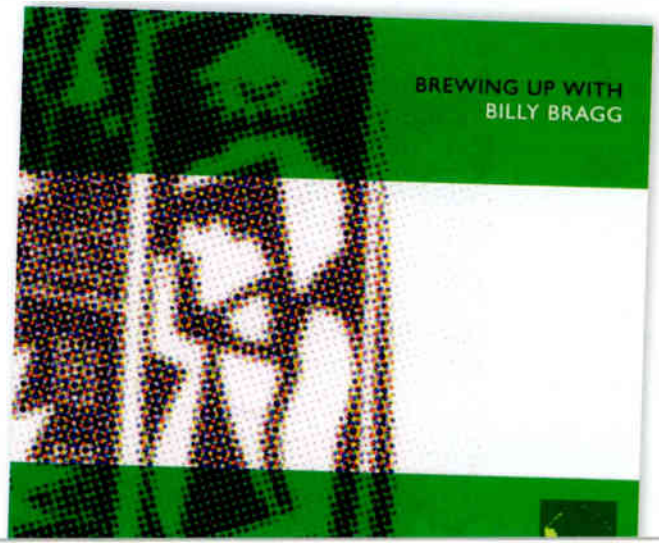
"I don't know how metaphysical I should make this, but on the golf course of life it's the first tee, a position to progress from. I don't know what it will develop to. I'll do it until people expect it, and when they expect it I'll change."

At the odd Bragg performance you may bump into his mother, somewhere at the back of the hall. If you ask her about her son she'll probably tell you that despite all that racket he really is quite an intelligent boy, that he doesn't have to be doing this, that he could have a proper job. She's not the only person who keeps her son in check.

"I'm very conscious of not being a comedian; that's why the raps are varied, because I don't want to turn into Lenny Henry. All I want to get over is that I'm not taking it too seriously.

"Some people say I play funny songs, but as far as I'm concerned they're all very serious. But the humour is there, definitely. It's a great weapon, like a velvet-glove punch. People who make great pronouncements and don't have a sense of humour are the ones who believe themselves to be Moses with the tablets. If you can't take a joke then you shouldn't have joined up in the first place, as they used to say to me when they threw me in the river.

"If you can't read the press and laugh at whatever they say about you, whether it's someone announcing that at the next gig Bragg will walk on water or someone saying the big-nosed bastard can't even sing. If you can't laugh at all that, then you may as well forget it." *Gavin Martin* •



1984

JANUARY – MARCH

Julian Cope: "Maybe I just like the idea of being weird"

"I'm a star to me"

His nemesis Ian McCulloch makes stardom look easy. JULIAN COPE, though, is at odds with everything: parents, the music business, even himself. Psychedelic pin-up or acid casualty? In the wake of *World Shut Your Mouth*, an intrepid *MM* pieces together the evidence.

PETER NOBLE / GETTY

— MELODY MAKER FEBRUARY 18 —

JULIAN COPE WOKE up this morning a victim of having been born. Questions crawled around his room, up the walls, over the ceiling; the same questions as always, wearing slightly different masks, tarnished or twisted or moulded anew by a little more time having passed.

Again he wondered what it was like when he was born. Was it like a trip where separations didn't exist, like a dog's eye view of an image on a TV screen? When did everything start making sense? When did the fact looking over the cradle going "goo, goo, goo" extricate its identity from the sky? Did everyone think like this?

He decided he didn't care. He had enough trouble keeping himself together without worrying whether society thought him insane. But maybe he'd overdone it. He felt pleased with himself that he'd stopped taking acid a year ago – there were just enough holes in his shield to allow flashbacks that comforted him with a sense that his past was a companion to his present without there being enough perforations to turn him into just another addled rock casualty.

He reflected briefly on Club Zoo when he was having a bit of a problem with his personality, and something Bill Drummond said when the Teardrops first started set him off laughing aloud. "Don't ever take acid, Copey," Drummond had said. "You're quite like that in any case and it would be just horrible!"

Cope felt once more the thrill of the challenge and knew that Bill had been right. His childhood had been good enough not to be a learning process, not to be something you get through before you start living. His parents, for better or worse, had given him a life that started at nought and ended at 70. Every memory lived on, pregnant with experience, another door to another door. Like the model car he'd recently bought; when he'd opened the box, he got the same feeling he did when he first had a car like it in 1966. Like a line of cocaine, he'd gone, "God!"

He thought of [ex-Teardrops manager/producer/keyboards player David] Balfe; how when they'd tripped together, Balfey'd take three times as much and never get as far out as he did. Balfey'd say, "Hey, let's go out and get a drink," and Copey'd go, "NO WAY! I really like this patch of floor over here. Let's stay in."

He reflected, with some relief, that he'd only ever had one bad trip, at Manchester Hacienda, and that was only because that girl, who'd moved into his flat when he'd moved out, had told him she'd read one of his mother's letters and it had been so intense and suddenly there was this girl, who had nothing to do with it, stuck in a line between him and his mother.

Other situations, he marvelled, were probably just as heavy, but he hadn't realised it until afterwards; like the time that guy threw a pint of beer over him at The Venue and he'd gone over and said, "Look, you're gonna think I'm really stupid, but were you being heavy just then? I can't work it out 'cos I'm tripping?"

He remembered the look on the guy's face and he smiled. He could probably have been in a Berlin gaol right now for some of the stuff that went down and he suddenly wondered whether he was good or bad. He thought he'd like to think he was good because he had a strong sense of morality, but then again, morality was a society thing, like insanity.

He mused over the notion, introduced in a recent interview, that maybe the youth of today felt castrated and subconsciously yearned for a war. He decided he wasn't much bothered, because he couldn't see that much worth saving in humanity. "I mean, if mankind is the end of the chain," he thought, "fuckin' hell... was it worth it?"

ALBUMS REVIEW 1984

Frozen postures

NME FEB 18 Cope's solo debut fails to fully embrace his psychedelia.

Julian Cope World Shut Your Mouth MERCURY

I fear we might shut our collective gob for the rest of time and we still wouldn't get a good Julian Cope album. I didn't wanna be the one to spank the author of "Treason" – of "Reward" – of the coolest ever paean to acid punk rock. It's just turned out that way.

Betwixt the loud ideals and clowning rhetoric of Julian Cope, and the dull, stale polish of this rock record, there is, distinctly and poignantly, a chasm. It is difficult to reason how a man who preaches so convincingly about Flipper or Scott Walker or the 13th Floor Elevators can make such a predictable drama out of "rock".

For Cope now to revamp the old soulful psychedelics to any happy effect requires total abandon, not this tousle-headed whimsy. It's a strange reversal of the days when the Bunnymen couldn't get a paw in *Top Of The Pops*' doors; where today McCulloch's emotions flow so forcefully into classical shapes and arrangements, Cope is so conscious of what he wants the music to do to you that it never does anything.

World Shut Your Mouth takes some fun ideals and assorted '60s knick-knacks – oboes, sitars, moon-eyed lyrical nonsense – and slaps over them the clean sheen of '80s rock production. It's characterless, not quite the Hugh Jones of *Heaven Up Here*, nor the Langer/Winstanley of *Punch The Clock*, just smooth, functional, forgettable.

It would be adequate were the songs a little better. Cope's never been able to write alone, and there's no sign of constructive collaboration from the technicians who fill out this music. The "hard" songs of *World...* are unconvincing, the neo-Teardrop "Passionate Friend" is just silly. "*People I see/Just remind of me of mooing/Like a cow on the grass/And that's not to say/There's anything wrong/With being a cow anyway.*"

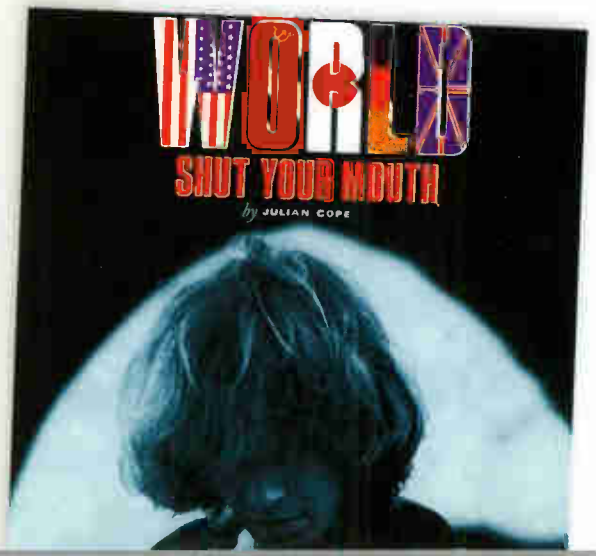
"Bandy's First Jump" might pass if McCulloch sang it, but (as I've been trying hard not to say) we all know Cope can't sing, etc. It's a bright but mundane rocker driven by trusty Gary Dwyer's over-busy snare and Stephen Lovell's, crude guitar filling. Elsewhere Cope alters this formula with some rather unnecessary organ or Kate St John's querulous oboe. Drug saga "Kolly Kibber's Birthday" is a merciful exception, where standard acoustic power chords, set above rapid-fire electro-bass drum repeater, seize the ear in a relative swirl of excitement.

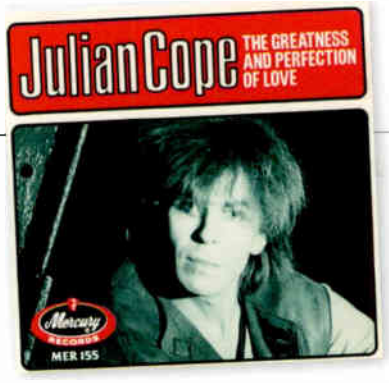
The problem with Cope is that he writes everything in major chords, so that there's never the cancer-in-the-sugar sensation he demands of music. All is delivered with the same orotund enthusiasm, be it the soft, Blondiesque pop of "Elegant Chaos", the forced, Matt Johnson-style funkiness of "Pussyface", or the wistful Kevin Ayers of "Lunatic And Fire-Pistol". To this day, Cope is singing "*Baa-Baa-Baa*" and meaning it.

Naturally, the main body of lyrical matter concerns one Julian Cope – Cope-as-lover, Cope-as-prophet, Cope-as-buffoon maverick. "*Someone caught me looking/Dancing on my fire escape/Oh, I could shit the past, yes...*"; "*Once I was Pride/Lived in the sweetest dream of Foolishness*"; "*Nine times I'm bleeding in my purity*". Clearly he has little of pressing importance to communicate. If the songs aren't directly about him and his career, they're about yet another no-way love affair, all frozen postures and personifications, like sketches for a video. I don't know why singers don't just mumble random sounds if they can't think of respectable themes for their songs. Anyone who can pen the line "*All is lost/In bright confusion*" must seriously consider calling it a day.

World Shut Your Mouth is that sad and weary thing, another rock album, and it won't do Nitwit any good at all. Time he learned to accept his award and split.

Barney Hoskyns





It didn't much matter to him if he died. The idea of living forever repulsed him and he felt again the guilty resentment for old people that always came upon him when he pictured one of his mother's friends who'd suddenly been converted to Catholicism as if some inner voice had told her, "OK, start repenting now."

He realised that you could never imagine not existing, that to imagine it was, in itself, to exist, but he thought, "Wouldn't it be brilliant if you could actually do it?" He started thinking about eternal blackness and then thought, "Hold on, it wouldn't be black", so he started thinking about eternal colourlessness and came to the conclusion that nothing was an empty box without the box round it.

Recalling a conversation with Dorian, he began to worry about the time the kids they planned to have would find their dad an embarrassment or maybe they'd turn out to be neo-Nazis or something and he'd have to put his foot down. He reminded himself, once again, that he had no idea what his parents thought of him, recalling his father asking if he ever met people who take drugs. He laughed. It proved his father knew absolutely nothing and his mother was content not to read his interviews in the papers because of the barrack-room language he used.

He suddenly felt angry, overcome by the suspicion they'd deceived him as a child by making him believe that they were able to handle a lot more than they really could, and he recalled how a couple of years ago, he'd actually despised his mother because he'd wanted to tell her, "I do this, I do that, I'm unfaithful to my wife," and he couldn't. He resented that they'd actually made him what he was, but now, he reminded himself, he accepted that they were just two unworldly people who thought they were worldly. "I accept it," he whispered under his breath, "but it pisses me off no end.

"I don't even know if I like me," he pondered. "But then, that's not really the question. The fact is that someone's made me with good bits and hang-ups and, for some reason, I want to project them."

He recalled being told recently that he talked as if he didn't much care what people thought of him any more, and he figured that was true. He'd had two-and-a-half years with The Teardrop Explodes aiming for something that he thought he wanted, thinking (just like everyone else) that when he got there he'd be the one who turned everyone on and do things a bit differently, but when he got there it was all so much bullshit.

He'd decided he didn't want to end up living in comparative luxury feeling like a twat, but he'd never worked out whether it was possible to be famous, even infamous, and keep a grip on reality. All he knew was that he believed in music, in its incredible duality – like Shakespeare wasn't writing great art but, because he wasn't, it became great art.

He recalled reading something Mac had said ("I am a Shakespearean character and Julian Cope is a *Beano* character") and he thought, "Yeah, that's true; but what Mac fails to realise, because he's not aware of Shakespeare, because he just sees him as a big block of learning but doesn't actually read him, is that Shakespeare's characters were what *Beano* characters are now; characters to entertain a bawdy 16th-century audience who'd just come in off the streets.

He worried, briefly, that he used too many Mac analogies. It was nothing personal, it was just that he was aware of Mac and watched his movements and saw him declaiming as if what he did was incredibly important. Cope had seen Shakespeare performed at Stratford and he knew that Mac had got it all wrong. It wasn't an impressive, altogether-now "Is This A Dagger I See Before Me?" routine; it was more real than that.

Cope reflected that he'd been shying away from things important recently. You could miss an irony by having it thrust in your face. People were always asking could Cope cope? Some had decided he'd had a nervous breakdown, others thought he'd faked it for the romantic glamour of a struggling cult figure. Someone even suggested that he didn't know whether Cope could be trusted or not and Cope was inclined to agree.

He'd split the Teardrops simply because he didn't think there was anything to be gained in what they were doing. He'd been uncomfortable with his public image and his attitude had changed nightly on stage. Why was he there, what was he doing? There had never been such a self-conscious performer. What was this strange compulsion to lay himself bare in public?

> "I don't even know if I like me. But that's not really the question"

He wasn't sure what, if any, value it had as he remembered how he'd embarrass 90 per cent of the audience and think, "Well, what other point is there?" His sex rap in Nottingham haunted him. Had he really taunted the girls at the front with the rhetorical come-on, "You're thinking about fucking me, aren't you?"

He'd really freaked them out but he'd had to do it; he couldn't do what Mac had been doing for years, taking it down and doing "Light My Fire" or "Sex Machine". Eighty per cent of the time he wasn't even in the mood for rhyming, so his raps were lousy, although at least he was doing something.

He thought of the pattern of recent interviews and sighed. Of course his album was self-examining, but whether he was in search of salvation or just after attention he couldn't say. Maybe both. He'd been asked if he was really a nutter, or whether he just wanted people to think he was, or whether he really didn't know, and he'd replied, "Maybe I just like the idea of being weird. But hold on – anybody who likes the idea must be quite weird in any case."

He pondered his album. He was glad he'd settled for short songs rather than Jesus Christ Meets Warhol, which everybody anticipated, and he'd tried to cut the time between thought and expression by recording it almost as it poured out of him. That Lou Reed lyric was the best ever: "*Between thought and expression lies a lifetime.*"

But it shouldn't have to be that way. It was driving him crazy, the whole idea that two people had to communicate in such an antiquated way, the syntax and phrasing of any sentence getting in the way of real meaning. Thought-transference was what he was after; that way there'd be none of the confusion inherent in language between serious intent and irony.

It was, he sighed, an impossible dream, but at least on *World*... he'd cut through the sacred veneer of technique to get at expression.

He anticipated a lot of things to be said. Like, in the wake of his *NME* feature on psychedelia and his ranting press release condemning modern pop when he'd folded the Teardrops, accusations of kitsch revivalism, even snobbery, were well on the cards. He decided he didn't care; he wasn't really into defences and, in all honesty, this album was him and the degree to which other people liked it was the degree to which they would ever be able to respond to him. It was genuine.

There was nothing on *World*... that he'd particularly change. There were parts that he found embarrassing, the twee parts, the trite parts, the parts of real bravado, but they were all him, so sod it. He'd realised long ago that pop couldn't accept whole human beings, that it had to shave off numerous dimensions before it could market any act, and he didn't much care any more.

The album wasn't saying anything really except, "This is me." It wasn't that what he liked musically was better than anything going on at the moment; it was just that this was what he liked. He didn't even really want it to be successful, but at the same time, he wanted everybody to think, "This is brilliant music."

Julian Cope's mind muddled blank for a moment and then he remembered reading in this month's *Playboy* how, when John Lennon died, everybody started ripping off Yoko and he thought, "God, who needs that? For all the money in the world you wouldn't need that."

Ultimately, he supposed, money could buy you a little bit of something if you didn't have much as a human being. He was more interested in being a successful human being than a successful product of the capitalist society.

"I am a star. I'm a star to me," he thought, "and I don't need it confirmed by other people."

Julian Cope woke up this morning a victim of having been born all over again. *Steve Sutherland* •

A SUITABLE CASE FOR TREATMENT

numerous dimensions before it

November 17, 1984: Nina Simone at the piano in London for a performance that was recorded and released as *Live At Ronnie Scott's*

"It's a hard, lonely life"

NINA SIMONE is down, but not yet out. Post-nap, pre-rubdown, the formidable artist airs the grievances which attend her reputation. "I'm known as a diva now. Do you know what a diva is?" she asks. "Good. I want you to print that."

— NME FEBRUARY 4 —

AT 4.30 PM, a worn and dishevelled Nina Simone is still tucked up in her plush Park Lane hotel bed.

The curtains are drawn, the lighting discreet – its glare directed away from her sullen orbs sunk in layers of eyeshadow smudge and rolls of puffy flesh.

A cassette of Marvin Gaye's *Midnight Love* and a Walkman lie on the dresser, but the only sound comes from this formidably sized middle-aged woman – shouting orders and ripostes to her tall, slim brother, manager, organ player and sometime vocal accompanist Sam, who busies himself with sheafs and folders on the other side of the room.

As soon as we enter, she's on the offensive.

"No pictures! I won't have no pictures!" she thunders.

The arrogant and cantankerous Nina Simone pantomime is under way; at the moment photographer Peter Anderson is playing Little Red Riding Hood to her big bad wolf, but I'll soon be taking over.

"Here he comes again, are you deaf? I said NO PHOTOGRAPHS! Sam! SAM! Tell him, Sam. Just give him the ones we have."

In the middle of this verbal crossfire – she's facing me but shouting at Peter over my shoulder, Peter is looking at Sam, and Sam is telling me to sit down – I take a bedside seat, turn on the recorder and wait for the sweet, lustrous voice to fill me, to fill us all, with worldly wisdom. Her attention roused, she turns round in bed. A left breast threatens to poke out from under a loosely tied purple gown as she gets tetchy again.

"What do you want?" she scowls.

I try some small talk to break the ice: How's London? The shows? The interviews? Oh, Nina, I see you like Marvin Gaye... But she doesn't want to »

DAVID REDFERN / GETTY

know. Tired, suspicious and in a bad mood, she wants the job over with as soon as possible.

"Oh my God! What kind of questions are these? Come on now, shoot!"

The interview was a certain kind of seduction. It lasted half an hour, she started out hard and impenetrable, became warm and friendly midway through, and at the end she was tired but smiling. I was exhausted.

EUNICE WAYMON WAS born in Tryon, North Carolina, on 21 February, 1933. A resident of Paris, France, for the last four years, she's in London to play a £12.50-a-head two-week residency at Ronnie Scott's. Coming near the end of her stint, she's starting to feel the strain of her years and the hectic schedule.

"I don't want to go on stage at Ronnie Scott's tonight. Sometimes it just gets to be a real bore, but I have to go. It didn't use to be a bore, but the pressure of having to do it every night is very great. But I must go – I have to make money and I'm famous. Fame is something you can't stop once it has started."

In the hallowed echelons of black music the classically nurtured soul of Nina Simone holds a singularly unique position. Her route from rural poverty to classical academy, through '50s jazz cocktail bar, the activism of civil rights and college circuits of the '60s, into festival and concert halls in the '70s, to the present where she yearns for the irreproachable status of a diva (which, suitably, means being a prima donna, as well as a great singer) did not follow the normal course of most black female performers.

The sheer enormity of her work is hard to put in a context. It has a grasp big enough to incorporate the sanctity of gospel, the rough-hewn folksy "Gin House Blues" and "The Work Song", impeccable jazzy quintet reworkings of standards like "Mr Bojangles" and "Just Like A Woman".

During America's Depression of the '30s, the backwater of Tryon was hardly the ideal birthplace for a potential prodigy. But along with her family – three sisters, four brothers and a very religious mother and father – at four, Nina began playing piano at gospel revival meetings.

At one performance she caught the attention of a well-heeled admirer who offered to pay for her to have formal classical training. When the patron's support was discontinued, a Eunice Waymon Fund was set up. Local folks gave so generously that, having graduated from high school in North Carolina, Nina was able to move to a classical academy in New York.

"I hated those recitals. At the first one in the white library there was a big hassle about where my mother and father would sit. That hurt me. Miss Mazzie [her teacher] never knew how tense I was and how scared those white people made me. I had to go across the tracks. I was split in half. I loved Bach, but the music was never a joy, never a pleasure.

"When I was young I wanted to be famous as a classical pianist. But I've achieved it as a star and it's a very hard, very lonely life. I would prefer to have achieved it as a classical pianist. In America, in New York I got turned down from the first academy I went to because of racial prejudice. And that was something I never got over, because it changed me into a showbiz person. And, really, I never wanted to do that."

AS WE SIT talking in this dimly lit room, her fierce exterior soon cracks and underneath lies a sad but resilient figure. Simone's tale is scarred with the scourge of prejudice, the ugly machinations of the business and two broken marriages. Sometimes her voice breaks from its matronly boom and she sounds as frail and helpless as a small girl. She's lovesick, broke, unable to create... it's all quite tragic, actually.

About halfway through the interview the room-service trolley arrives and she breakfasts quickly and voraciously on chicken consommé, salad sandwiches and a glass of lager. I have a mental picture of her, her mouth filled with bread, beer and soup, and she's trying to look serious, staring straight ahead and declaring, "I'm known as a diva now. That's the way I want it. Do you know what a diva is? Good. I want you to print that."

And that's kind of tragic too.

From an early age the consummate artistry which was to inform her future recordings was formed.

"I started off as a child prodigy. You know what that is? A child prodigy plays anything they hear. I didn't start playing gospel; I started playing bop, gospel, jazz, blues... anything I heard... hymns."

Although she never really "made it" as a classical pianist, the style is a base for all her playing. She used it to counterpoint melodies, to cast huge spectres and gashes of melancholy to aching love songs like "The Other Man", "I Don't Want Him", or the present "If You Knew". Or as a centrepiece to a towering masterpiece like "Four Women", placing the songs on a setting that is so deep and dark and troubled that it can genuinely frighten the listener. The ability to do this must be a source of gratification.

"Yes, it is tremendously gratifying. The audience appreciate that, but don't think of it as classical, they just think of it as my style. The fact is I play African-rooted classical music. I would rather use two drummers and nobody else if I could. I don't like using guitar... I like using drummers because they can adopt themselves to ballads and not get in the way with a whole lot of clapping and carrying on that has nothing to do with ballads at all."

When she played to 2,000 people at the Barbican Centre 18 months ago she was accompanied only by a drummer and her grand piano. It was a fascinating performance – obsessive, consumed with passion, anger, sorrow, love, sex, death. Simone writhed and squirmed in front of the audience. She seemed to be laying herself bare, as if unable to separate whatever drama or crisis in her personal life had inspired the songs off the stage. She doesn't agree.

"Hell, no. My personal life is just as important to me as my music, but I keep the two completely separate. That stuff you saw, I can turn it on and off like a faucet."

On stage or off, however, Simone can be a weird, disparaging character. Performances range from the sublime to the ridiculous. Barney Hoskyns recalls a show some months back in Los Angeles where she regaled the audience with twee ivory tinkling and went through the whole concert speaking French.

By all accounts her shows at Ronnie's have been similarly erratic. I caught two nights. The first I was seated about two feet from her. I should have been rapt, but somehow wasn't. She came on stage looking tired and fragile; painted and besequinned, she stood surveying the audience with her huge shoulders arched, her hands on her hips and an expression of vague disdain on her face. While there were undeniable moments of beauty, the set as a whole had a hollow ring. She wasn't enjoying it (after the third song she started to make regular timechecks with the guy at the side of the stage).

"It was a shock. It was very different having to play nightclubs when I first went to New York. I went there to study classical music, but I was broke and I had to make money. It was very hard to get acclimatised to showbusiness; I hated it then and I still do. I hate the hotel rooms, the lack of good food, the lack of a normal life.

"The audience at Ronnie Scott's is wonderful. But I'd rather be playing the Royal Festival Hall. I don't like nightclubs, but I am grateful it's been packed out every night."

> "Fame is something you can't stop once it has started"

AS A RECORDING artist, Simone's career has been fraught with contractual and business problems. Her major beef throughout the interview is how 50 or so pirate companies owe her money that runs into "the millions".

She was 25 when she recorded her first session for Bethlehem Records, the bulk of which can be found on the *My Baby Just Cares For Me* Charly reissue. She shot to national acclaim with the million-selling version of Gershwin's "I Loves You Porgy", and her interpretative powers as singer, arranger and musician on that and other standards such as Duke Ellington's "Mood Indigo" or traditional spirituals like "He's Got The Whole World In His Hands" reaped lavish critical acclaim, casting her as a supper-club performer par excellence.

Was it a thrill to start recording?

"No, it was very hard, and when it was recorded I had to beg for them to release it."

LPs such as the now rare *Nina Simone – Jazz As Played In An Exclusive Side Street Club* and *Nina*

January 9, 1984: one of Simone's early appearances at Ronnie Scott's jazz club in Soho, London

Simone And Friends (with guest appearance by Carmen McRae) followed, but with the turn of the decade Simone tired of her position and moved on to international stardom. In 1961 she married former police detective Andrew Stroud, who also became her manager. Her own songs began to take prominence and they were spitting fire and blood, declarations of black pride and determination.

In 1963, following a church bombing in Alabama which killed little girls, and shortly after black rights leader Medgar Evers was shot in front of his home in Jackson, Mississippi, she wrote the memorable "Mississippi Goddam": *"Alabama's got me so upset/Tennessee made me lose my rest/And everybody knows about Mississippi – goddam!"*

It was songs like "Young Gifted And Black" (turned into a reggae pop classic by Bob & Marcia) and her reading of militant black poet Langston Hughes' *Backlash Blues* that garnered her a reputation as The High Priestess Of Soul. When Phyl Garland interviewed Simone for her book *The Sound Of Soul* in 1969, she asked her how the change from nightclub to protest singer came about. She smiled and said, "Now that my people have decided to take over the world... I'm going to have to do my part."

Nowadays it's something she'd rather forget.

"I worked for the... ummm... what do you call it, Sam? Yes, the civil rights movement during the '60s."

Are you still involved with it?

"No, I am not. It got me into a lot of trouble. It hurt my career. Maybe it helped black people, but it hurt me. That's why I'm not making the money I should be right now. At least 50 pirate companies are holding out on me because of that."

That's bad, I say, because I thought you were at the height of your powers in those days.

"I do too, dear. But it hurt my career in terms of money. I was playing benefits but I wasn't getting my money then or now. But no doubt some of my best songs came out of that period. 'Four Women' was written overnight, but it took me four months before I had the nerve to play it to somebody because I thought it would be rejected. I played it for my husband on an airplane one day; I thought he wasn't going to like it because it was so direct and blatant.

"'Mississippi Goddam' I wrote in about an hour. But remember, these things were written when I was stable, I was married and I was living at home. I don't write now. I'm staying in hotels. I can't; there's no pianos here."

Doesn't that make you sad?

"Oh, honey, it saddens me terribly. It makes me so depressed. I don't know what to do. Not to have a piano in here and to be able to create in here. It saddens me more than anything."

The second time I see Nina at Ronnie Scott's she is in full command, fusing together all her strengths and talents – siding a gorgeous reading of "Porgy" with the parched pathos of the new "Father In My Wings", moving from the funky rumble of "See Line Woman" to a majestic "My Baby Just Cares For Me".

From the crowd two guys presented her with red roses (just like a real diva!) and she made dates with them for after the show. Apart from the scathing "Stupid Dog" ("dedicated to the recording industry of North America") most of her new songs are ballads.

"For me, love songs and ballads are the most important kind of songs. Why? Because I'm not in love, and I love love, and I have a child, and to me the most important thing in the world is love and being married."

The last great Nina Simone LP to reach these shores was *Baltimore* in 1978, and she still plays Randy Newman's title track, begrudgingly.

"What I'm trying to do now is sing my own songs. It'll be the first time I've sung just my own songs. I want record companies to buy them."

Did you never have a lot of money?

"Yeah, I had plenty. But I got divorced and I was swindled out of it by record companies, theatres, lawyers and bad management," she claims. "I like the things money can buy, but I haven't got any. I'll tell you again – the pirate companies are keeping my money because of the civil rights movement. The only money I'm earning is what I'm working for."

If true, Nina Simone must have had some dubious management to get ripped off by 50 record companies, but then the lady is not unknown to exaggerate or make outbursts which subsequently have to be retracted. A recent diatribe against Charly Records was one such incident (NME *Jan 28, 1984 – see news section p10*), and she once told an interviewer that she had been forced to record *Baltimore* having been kidnapped by five men and put in a cellar for three days without sleep or water and released only when she had finished recording the LP.

She now lives in Paris, visits Africa as often as possible with her best friend Miriam Makeba, one-time wife of Stokely Carmichael and originator of "click" singing. ("You've never heard of her. What age are you anyway? Man, she's world famous.") She goes to America as little as possible – "I don't like it; that's where they ripped off my songs. I get really physically sick every time I'm there" – and feels at home in Paris.

"There I am very, very famous. Did you know how big I was in Paris? Oh man, it's easy for me to live in Paris, everyone knows my songs. In the street I get recognised all the time – taxi drivers, meat cutters, flower sellers. I like that. I need that."

Nina says she's putting the finishing touches to an autobiography, compiled from a diary she's kept throughout her 30 years in showbusiness. She has a recurring dream that she must finish it, and the projected title is *Between The Keys* or *Princess Noir*. Her immediate plans are to get a single released, a duet with Sam on a version of Jerry Butler's "Let It Be Me". And, like she's been saying for the past five years, she wants to sue the ass off all the companies that have ripped her off.

Before I go, I ask her if she's aware of her reputation for not being the easiest or most amicable interview in the business.

She grins. "Sure I'm difficult. I have a reputation like that because people don't know me. I'm used to it now. It's better to have a reputation for being too difficult than it is for having one for being kind of easy. Hell, if I was any easier they'd be walking all over me."

She's looking forward to a few more hours curled up under the sheets before a lady comes to give her tired bones a rubdown before the concert. Sam tells me it's time to go.

Hey Nina, have you ever heard of the Sex Pistols?

"Yes, but I never hear them. I hear The Police and I like them. I don't think I'd like the Sex Pistols."

I tell her one of the best things about her show at the Barbican was the way she unleashed so much wrath and force at the audience. It was the nearest they'd get to experiencing the shock of the Sex Pistols. I appreciated the wind-up.

Just poked above the sheets, her face cracks into a wide, sly beam. She closes her eyes and sinks away. *Gavin Martin* •

DAVID CORIO / GETTY

The Smiths: evoking a vision of the city "strained through early-'60s films of late-'50s novels"

ALBUMS REVIEW 1984

ALBUMS

The Smiths

ROUGH TRADE

"And if you must go to work tomorrow.../Well, if I were you I wouldn't bother" ("Still Ill")

Without being pejorative, there is something soporific about the sound of The Smiths. It's so easy to lapse into their languid dreams without stopping to question where precisely this man Morrissey should be placed in the infinite space between heaven and pillow.

Just how clinical and how innocent is this seducer of our imaginations? How genuine his successive (and often mutually exclusive) stances as corrupted and corruptor, reformed literary libertine and celibate gay bachelor? After contemplation of his flamboyant advances, I've arrived at no conclusion as to what precisely he bears before him or what exactly he is after. What remains at the core of Morrissey's art is a mystique that has so far proved impenetrable – he affords the odd insight, but there is never enough glimpsed to dispel his fascination.

Consideration of The Smiths always ends up as attempted penetration of Morrissey's singular charms, primarily because The Smiths in plural are as average as their uncharismatic name suggests. Where Morrissey is a wielder of the archaic art of the word, his cohorts are merely competent workers in the grimy craft of pop. Musically, The Smiths are little more than mildly regressive. What saves them is Morrissey's rare grasp of the myriad distortions of the pastel worlds of nostalgia. Much of the intrigue behind The Smiths is not what they have to offer but the seductive manner in which Morrissey offers it – his beguiling invitation to forget art and dance in a notion of animated camp. At this point we come to his enigma – of the uncalculated versus the contrived.

This has its opening in the cold, quivering reflections of the plaintive epic "Reel Around The Fountain" – a picture of virtual classical proportions, with Morrissey's world-weary tones washing a grey tale of innocence lost. *"It's time the tale were told,"* he opens, *"Of how you took a child/And you made him old"* – you have to rouse yourself from the pleasant malaise that the lazy pace induces to recall that, at the end of the song, nothing of *"the tale"* has actually been revealed.

Throughout the LP, he captures a set of fascinations that appeal to the current mood – the only question is how many of them are indeed his own and how many the result of long years' research in a rented room in Whalley Range. Too frequently his philosophy of pop seems all too neatly prepared to appeal – the quaint campaign against the synthesizer, for example.

The mass appeal lies (unfortunately) in a form of traditionalism – so Morrissey offers the fictional tradition of "great pop" – complete this sequence in six letters: the Buzzcocks, Orange Juice, The...

Calculation, though, can offer an aesthetic of its own, and The Smiths, like Culture Club, weave an intricate web of insignia, delightful in its diversity, intriguing in its attention to detail, but finally impenetrable.

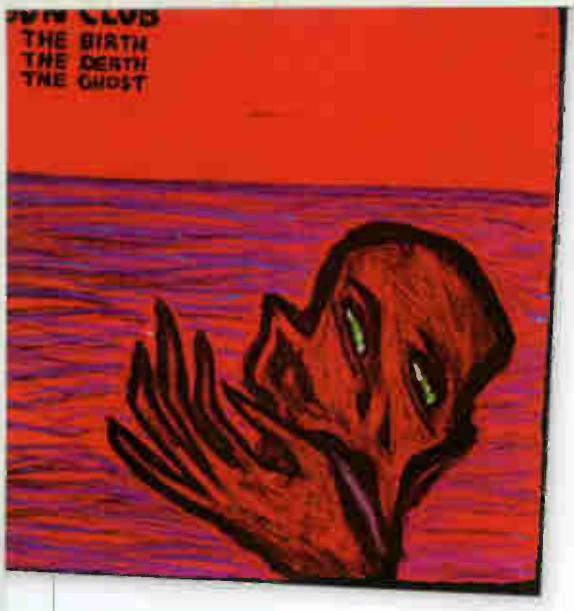
From the sexy male cover to "Hand In Glove", Morrissey has proved himself adept at the gender identity game – another tradition of long-standing appeal. Throughout the LP, he plucks at the same strings of homoeroticism: *"I'm not the man you think I am,"* he intimates coyly on "Pretty Girls Make Graves", concluding, *"I've lost my faith in womanhood"* – both of which are in fact snippets open to entirely opposite interpretations.

When he breaks his genderless rule, it is with a slyness we might expect: *"Into the depths of the criminal world I followed her..."*, calling up a reference to Cocteau's Orpheus films (a comparison not so obscure when you consider that their star, and Cocteau's lover, Jean Marais, was featured on the cover of "This Charming Man"). Where Cocteau's Orpheus is left unable to look at his wife (perhaps he too had lost his faith in womanhood), Morrissey ends with *"I need advice, because nobody ever looks at me twice."*

For every tendency in Morrissey's scheme of things, though, there is the necessary balance, for the heaving tragedy of *"And 'love' is just a miserable lie"* there's the flippancy of *"I know that windswept mystical air/It means I'd like to see your underwear"*.

It's more than just a question of balance, though; it's a problem of plausibility, and Morrissey is very believable. How convincing his aura of deceptive simplicity, how credible his imitation of the wide-eyed village boy adrift in the big city. When he claims to be *"a country mile behind the world"*, you believe him, largely because his view of the city is one visibly strained through early-'60s films of late-'50s novels – a notion of reality three times removed.

ALAMY



superimposed on Jim Morrison – all dolled up like a pelvis from hell – there was a hurt and a madness in the beached whale's bleached wail which that Sunset Boulevard shaman of instant catharsis Morrison never reached. Kid Congo left for The Cramps, but there's no ghoulish kitsch here; this black drug train is going straight to hell.

"Still Ill", for example, is a drama of flawed perfection, flickering fading values in dusty monochrome – Morrissey kissing beneath the iron bridge finds the fictional Britishness of his obsession slipping through his fingers: "*But we cannot cling to the old dreams any more.*"

What Morrissey captures above all is a notion of despair reflected perfectly in the lacklustre sound of his cohorts, a death of the punk ideals that Morrissey is quite old enough to have been closely involved in. In turn what distinguishes him from a Weller is firstly his wit, and secondly the sensitivity to deal in despair without resorting to preaching in desperation.

What does this suitor offer? A calculated plan, perhaps, but enough to haunt the imagination. For the moment that's enough.

Don Watson, NME Feb 25

The Gun Club The Birth, The Death, The Ghost ABC

Blood, booze, and Host: midway through a mess of "Preachin' The Blues" on this sub-bootleg memento of pre-*Fire Of Love* Gun Club, Jeffrey Lee Pierce, sensing he does not have the Whisky A Go-Go's full and undivided attention, orders its silence. "Fuck your face!" he yells. "We're talking 'bout religion!!"

Poor Jeffrey. How do you preach the blues to a pack of Tinseltown trendhounds? More to the point, why do you preach the blues to a pack of Tinseltown trendhounds? Why, because his mythic, swampy America of damnation and superstition, of rivers of blood and alcohol, is one of the only significant challenges to the glam urban nihilism of 1980.

Pierce was Darby Crash in a non-canine dog collar, an obsessive mythologist forging a link between blues and punk. If visually he suggested Meat Loaf superimposed on Jim Morrison – all dolled up like a pelvis from hell – there was a hurt and a madness in the beached whale's bleached wail which that Sunset Boulevard shaman of instant catharsis Morrison never reached. Kid Congo left for The Cramps, but there's no ghoulish kitsch here; this black drug train is going straight to hell.

Pierce might be ignorable if he hadn't written the odd great song. The best – "Carry Home", "Brother And Sister" – are on *Miami* and suggest that he writes best when least intoxicated by his obsessions. But what can a poor blues-crazed hulk do after being produced by Chris Stein besides dredge up his very own *Metallic KO*? Drunk on the blood of ghosts, this half-dead-at-CBs-style souvenir is like a conscious massacring of folk tradition.

"Bo Diddley's A Gunslinger", a visceral complement to Vega's "Collision Drive", or "Walking With The Beast", a "Mona"-style skull-stomp, are simple enough. But when he tries Mack Self's "Willie Brown" or the absurd, unaccompanied cottonpicker's cry of "Field Holler", Pierce's evangelism verges on the grotesque. Attempting to snare the fatalistic horror of Robert Johnson or Charley Patton in a setting of trash punk, he overloads and saturates myth until the ghosts are as bloated as he is.

Significantly, the cover is an unholy blood-red marriage of Munch's *Scream* and Cave's "Bad Seed" (minus the swastika). Pierce and Cave: both sick, hard-drinking preachers of pop's lost highways, wrapping ring-swollen fingers round crucifixes in futile faithless agony.

A supreme posture. They are post-punk's Waylon'n'Willie, Pierce as Cave's Saint Huck (Finn), the gangling one himself a wasted Natty Bumppo. (Just a suggestion.)

Do white men get the blooze?

Barney Hoskyns, NME, Feb 25

Cyndi Lauper on the Fun Tour, Chicago, April 24, 1984

SINGLES REVIEW 1984

SINGLES

Cyndi Lauper Girls Just Want To Have Fun
PORTRAIT/ EPIC

I can see the headlines now: "Ray Lowry 'Not Mad' Shock! New Evidence!" Cyndi Lauper used to sing with US band Blue Angel, whom nobody ever heard even though our man Ray was forever ranting about their brilliance. It's just possible he was right, after all. "Girls Just Want To Have Fun" is a frivolous pop-dance delight. Miss Lauper pours a world of authentic conviction into the song, and its message, though simple, is heartfelt: "*When the working day is done/Girls just want to have fun!*" This is a provocative new theory and I urge our top sociologists to seek verification forthwith. *NME Jan 21*

The Smiths What Difference Does It Make? ROUGH TRADE

Not so good as "...Charming Man" say some, but I'd say better. A wailing, wordless hook from your man Morrissey hovers, ghost-like, over a rubbery rockabilly beat, not marred one whit by Johnny Guitar Marr's spring-heeled periphery riffery. And the lyrics cut you, too. Perfect in its détente of tough and tender, this record, if that makes any sense. Give these men a big, big hit. (By the way, re. the *NME* Readers Poll, it's early days, but I wouldn't be surprised if the final results reveal something to The Smiths' advantage. Say no more.) *NME Jan 21*

Echo & The Bunnymen The Killing Moon
KOROVA

Stupendous. Well, I would say that, wouldn't I? But trust me: Mac and the members are not letting us down. "The Killing Moon", I think, introduces new depth to the group's recorded work. Certainly it plays on a note of sadness, regret, sense of loss that I don't recall in anything they've previously done. Will Sergeant's acoustic guitar and a sombre, slowly building chorus do much to establish this peculiar mood. Most of all, perhaps, it's the words – they're unusually direct and vulnerable for the Bunnymen, and being without that protective veil of vagueness, McCulloch sounds encouraged to ditch an amount of his own reserve, closer than ever to the emotional bone. I don't know. I know it's their most intriguing song since "A Promise". And I know the group won't be around forever. Treasure them now. *NME Jan 21*

PAUL NATKIN / GETTY

"We're not trying to change anything"

Yet DEPECHE MODE have a powerful "worker" image to go along with their robust synthpop. They're also big stars throughout Europe, where their melancholic beats have found a sympathetic audience. "We're just trying to make people think," says songwriter Martin Gore.

— MELODY MAKER JANUARY 7 —

SPARKLERS. THAT'S HOW German audiences display affection and appreciation. Sparklers, plus the odd lone klaxon crying out like a wolf with a peg on its nose.

To their most confirmed enemies, the piercing specks of light whizzing around like Tinkerbells in this metal barn must be an enduringly appropriate symbol of the group up on the stage.

Depeche Mode, remember, are supposed to play pretty music. Lightweight, harmless, mildly attractive maybe, but fragile, decorous and twee. At least, that's how the theory goes.

But then theories can always be proven wrong.

While the company blandsmiths perfect their corporate grip on the nation's pop pulse and the public's taste slithers slug-like towards a squidgy, marshmallow centre, some have been busy figuring how best to achieve a state of dissidence without sacrificing popular appeal.

It might be a hard balancing act, but in 1983 Depeche Mode managed the trick. A craftily awkward and deceptively spiky presence in the charts, they learned that kissing wasn't clever or even interesting when you'd been doing it for at least a couple of years without progressing to anything more daring. Taking stock of the overwhelming move towards a middle-of-the-road consensus (are some people afraid to admit they're not especially moved or stimulated by the pleasantries of Culture Club?), they found themselves moving steadily in the opposite direction. »

MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

Depeche Mode in Berlin, July 1984: (l-r) Martin Gore, Dave Gahan, Alan Wilder, Andrew Fletcher

Of course, their music has hardly become raucous or truculently rebellious, but if you think the Mode of "New Life" is the same Mode as "Love In Itself", then you obviously haven't been paying attention.

According to the chorus of the latter, love is now "*not enough in itself*", and their third LP (from which the song was taken as a single), *Construction Time Again*, confirms. There isn't a single love song here, not a word of romance or personal heartache. This fabric is stitched with the thread of socialism and liberal concern – a most unfashionable position to take up in this age of conspicuous egotism.

As for the music, it's synthpop still, but fattened and given strength. This isn't a party, it's a whole lot more.

Watching the group at Hammersmith Odeon a few weeks ago and more recently in Cologne and Düsseldorf, it struck me just how tawdry most other synthpop groups seem in comparison to the sure-fingered touch of Depeche.

Their pop glistens with modernity to such an extreme, futuristic degree that sometimes it seems difficult to credit that this is actually a popular chart pop group on stage. This is a pop that is rooted in the present, not some retrogressive notion of what "perfect pop" should sound like.

Perhaps some of you aren't convinced. Like me you've watched them on *Top Of The Pops* on countless occasions and been, at most, moved to twitch the odd toe while complaining that they looked like a collection of plain youngsters pressing buttons; school students dressed in pullovers that seem just that little bit too neat and nice.

In which case you need to see them live. When their synths mutate into a pulsating dance beat and David Gahan leaps across the stage as if he's determined to topple over into the orchestra pit, Depeche Mode ignite, their pop springing alive with an ebullient sense of energy. Depeche can be muscular – visceral even.

Not that things have always been that way.

"We've always been concerned – like the records always sounded a bit weak, but in the studio when we actually made them they sounded quite powerful."

Andy Fletcher is quite aware of some of their past problems. He and Alan Wilder (the only non-Basildonian in the group – the replacement for Vince Clarke) are facing the reporter across the breakfast table the night after 6,000 people of both sexes and a variety of ages have gone bananas at one of their performances.

"When we were going out playing live," continues Fletcher, "we were quite powerful, but when we actually tried to reproduce it on record it just sounded really weak and horrible. On the last album, we really tried to toughen up the sound."

Do people have the wrong idea about Depeche Mode?

"I've noticed that from just walking around the streets. Like where I live, in Basildon, I get quite a lot of abuse. A lot of people still think we're like teeny wimps. Wimps on synths."

"But I think that's our fault," admits Wilder. "It's nobody else's fault but our own that people have got that impression, because it's obviously the way we put ourselves across. You can't blame people for summing you up wrong, because it's down to you to get the right impression."

Wilder is being surprisingly candid. Perhaps as a relative "newcomer" (though his stay with the group now exceeds that of Vince) he can place them in perspective more astutely.

Whatever, Fletcher agrees: "We suffered a lot from the beginning, because we didn't really know what we were doing. If somebody took a picture of us, we smiled: we hadn't had any training. When we met the public and that, we acted like we would normally. [One *MM* staff member recalls that the first time he met the group they were playing hide-and-seek!] We came across to a lot of people as sickly and really bad. It wasn't anything that was planned or anything."

What kind of abuse did they receive?

"The whole catalogue really. Just walking along, people from cars, in pubs, going through the town centre."

"But that's Basildon for you," observes Wilder.

"Yeah, it's very like what we call a 'Span Town' – spanners, beer, boys. I s'pose it's because we've always lived there – they've seen so much of us that they've turned against us. If we go elsewhere we actually get praised by some people. I think it's a good contrast, because we don't like the pop-star thing, we try to play it all down. It's good getting a bit of abuse; it brings you down to earth."

What was that sentence? "We actually get praised by some people." Fletcher seems genuinely warmed by the idea that people could actually want to come and praise them. Yet paradoxically their popularity was achieved so early in their career that they virtually take it for granted. I've never seen a group look so cool and casual in the dressing room before a large gig; walking out of the room and onto the stage in front of 6,000, they look so unruffled it's as if they are wandering down the corridor to look for the lavatory. I wonder if they feel anaesthetised on stage.

"I mean it is an exciting feeling being on stage and playing, obviously. It gets you going," says Wilder, "but you are right – personally, I do kind of shut myself off and go into a shell and go through the motions. And enjoy it, but don't quite feel the whole thing."

"The reason it seems so casual," adds Fletcher, "is we just expect to go down well. During the time I've been with the band, I don't think we've ever gone down badly. You expect that reaction and it is like going through the motions."

So. They are going through the motions. At least sometimes. Fortunately this "live performance" is filled with much button-pushing. It doesn't matter. Part of the appeal of Depeche Mode is their mechanical insistence – the mathematical certainty of their beat.

BACKSTAGE AFTER THEIR Cologne show, Depeche Mode are feeding the fans. Autographs, chitchat, strained smiles, all are gratefully gobbled.

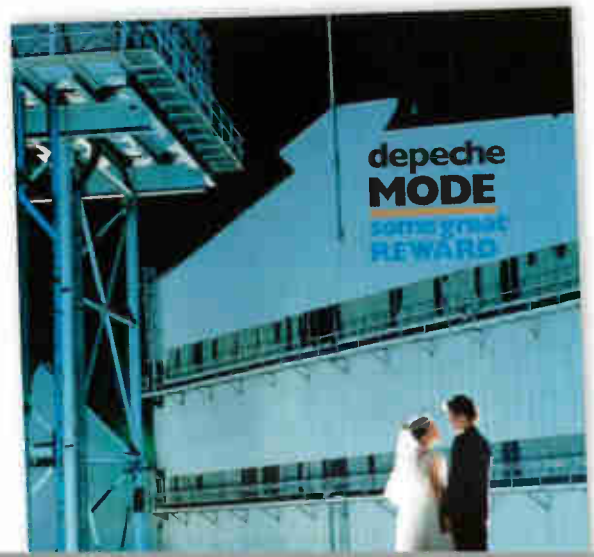
"Hi, Andy!" shouts a wan blond with spectacles; everyone looks up and stares as if an old friend has just walked into the room. The fan wants to know if Andy has heard of "Ze Ze". Andy hasn't. "Don't you mean 'The The?'" asks someone. "That's right, Ze Ze", grins the gangly fan, unaware of why sniggers are lighting up across the room.

Martin Gore has the right idea. Mode's chief composer, he is sitting in a corner knocking out the opening to Echo And the Bunnymen's "Rescue" on an acoustic 12-string guitar. Gore has been playing guitar for nine years – he only began to play the synth when he was 18 or 19. His songwriting is done on the guitar, mostly. He is a Jonathan Richman and Iggy Pop fan.

This isn't the most obvious thing people expect to hear backstage after a Depeche Mode gig, even if he does use the instrument briefly on stage. Mode mentor and (if you will forgive the alliteration) Mute master Daniel Miller is mooching around with a video camera recording the extraneous goings-on and minor diversions.

Also here are Mark and Suzie. They have come all the way from England to Germany just to see the Cologne and Düsseldorf gigs. Mark has a *Young Americans* hairstyle. Suzie is very quiet.

This is rock'n'roll-but-not-really. The autograph rituals, for sure, but it's not only in their eschewal of the traditional rock instrumentation that Mode elbow old stereotypes sideways. There is not a hint of dope to be smelt, not a sniff of cocaine to be snorted during the three days I spent with the group. No hours spent preening in front of the mirror (though Dave Gahan sports a mightily impressive flat-top barnet). The group leave the hotel early to get to their soundcheck, hit the stage bang on schedule at nine o'clock. Some people I know probably object to all this. But then some people I know think real men don't eat quiche.



Bands who say they need drugs to get through the boredom of a tour are talking crap, says Gahan. "I think a lot of that went on in the '70s; at that time that was what bands were expected to be like – totally out of it all the time. Now bands are generally a lot younger. The average age of a group in the '70s was about 35; now it's probably about 21."

Depeche Mode are currently riding a wave of popularity in Germany, having sold 200,000 copies of *Construction Time Again* and packed out concert halls without ever having had a single in their Top 20 – a situation

that would be unthinkable in the singles-dominated market of Britain.

"The sound we've come up with recently is slightly reminiscent of some of the earlier German electronic groups, like DAF, possibly," observes Wilder. This may explain some of the local enthusiasm. Where would Mode be without Kraftwerk?

As if to confirm the Teutonic twist, as soon as the group's tourbus arrives in the industrial city of Düsseldorf, Martin Gore rushes off to the HQ of local indie label Ata Tak to complete his collection of the label's releases (which include Der Plan, Pyrolator and Die Doraus).

Ask them why they mixed *Construction...* in Berlin's Hansa Studios (check the small print on *The Idiot* and *Low*) and they'll tell you it was simply because of the mixing desk there. And ask them why Alan Wilder bashes a piece of corrugated metal on stage during the song "Pipeline" and the answers will be less than totally straightforward, slightly defensive, as if they're about to be attacked for ripping off German metal-drummers Einstürzende Neubauten.

"Actually, when we decided about that we hadn't really cottoned on to all those [metal-beating] bands, but since it came into fruition all those bands have popped up as well, so I suppose it looks like we're climbing on some sort of bandwagon," says Wilder. "We just thought it would suit the song."

But Fletcher is a little more open about their relationship to the "movement".

"I think we all like the idea. When we actually made the album we did go on a sound-hunting expedition. We went down Brick Lane and just hit everything and then recorded it and took it back to the studio and then put it into the keyboard. That's how we made the track 'Pipeline'. We was, like, smashing corrugated iron and old cars. The vocals were recorded in a railway arch in Shoreditch – you've got the train three-quarters of the way through and the aeroplane up above. It's really interesting doing that."

Whether their adoption of a symbol of a worker-hero, hammer poised above head, for their album sleeve is directly influenced by the similar Stakhanovite actions of the likes of Neubauten is, maybe, interesting but ultimately irrelevant. Gahan tells me that they chose the symbol of The Worker simply because they felt it was a powerful image. And as an echo of the sleeve of their second LP, *A Broken Frame*, which depicts a peasant at work in cornfields, it is perfect – the hammer and the sickle. But though they describe themselves as "socialists with a small 's'", or perhaps because of it, they can be misinterpreted.

"We knew the tie between the hammer and the sickle on the two albums, obviously, but I don't think that was a thing we were trying to put across," says Gahan. He relates a story about the group turning up at a Belgian TV studio and being asked to stand on top of a giant haystack while behind them peasants stood with hammers and sickles and Russian flags flapped about insolently. They walked off the set until the flags were taken down.

But the choice of imagery is far from accidental – the symbol of "The Worker", the traditional property of the left, is a reflection of the political concerns taken up by Mode on *Construction...* – ecology, nuclear war, multinational power, famine, and the ideas of politics and socialism in themselves (*"All of these insurmountable tasks that lay before me"* – and that from "Love In Itself", a hit record!).

"We're not trying to change anything," says Gore, who wrote the lyrics to most of the songs (Wilder contributing the remaining two). "I don't think our music's going to change anything at all; we're just trying to make people think a little bit."

"Before," states Gahan, "they've been used to Depeche Mode with clever tunes, and a lot of earlier stuff was very throwaway lyrics, whereas with this they can hum along to a tune, be sitting in their bedroom, look at the lyric sheet and maybe they might actually agree with some of the subjects.

"I mean, none of the subjects are really heavy, ramming it down people's throats. Someone mentioned Heaven 17 to me the other day, but some of their lyrics are more aggressive – 'Crushed by The Wheels Of Industry'."

It's tempting to read too much into this apparently sudden turn towards politics – to expect revelations of some Damascus-like conversion to The Cause – yet Mode's attitudes seem essentially low-key, perhaps even a little naive. *"Let's take the whole of the world / The mountains and the sand / Let all the boys and the girls shape it in their hands"*, Gahan sings in 'And Then...'. Would it were so simple.

"None of us are really into it heavily," says Gore, "none of us belong to any parties. I don't think there's one of us that's interested even slightly in politics."

Gahan adds: "None of us have studied politics or anything like that. Oh, Andy's got an A-level. Ha ha! Andy's probably more interested than anyone else, but none of us are really serious about politics."

According to Andy Fletcher, they have always had socialist sympathies – it's just that this is the first opportunity they've had to air them. The lyrics on the first album were by Vince Clarke, who "doesn't really care about lyrics at all", and many of Gore's words on *...Frame* were written when he was only 16 or 17, which is "why they seem like bland love songs". Like Jim Kerr, much of Gore's writing since then had been influenced by his experiences of travelling around the world.

> "On the last album, we really tried to toughen up the sound"

But why such reticence on the subject, having dedicated a whole album to social issues? Andy Fletcher comes nearest to explaining their position when he says: "We've got to be careful that we don't become hypocrites. It's very easy to write about such subjects as famine, but then people just turn around and say, 'You're hypocrites!' I mean, we do earn quite a bit of money. I think we're too selfish to give all our money away, although that's what we should do."

In the wider context of politics, the symbol of The Worker is no longer a potent one – in many ways it serves as an almost embarrassing reminder of the image of the left as nostalgic and backward-looking, based on some mythical, idealised vision of the past.

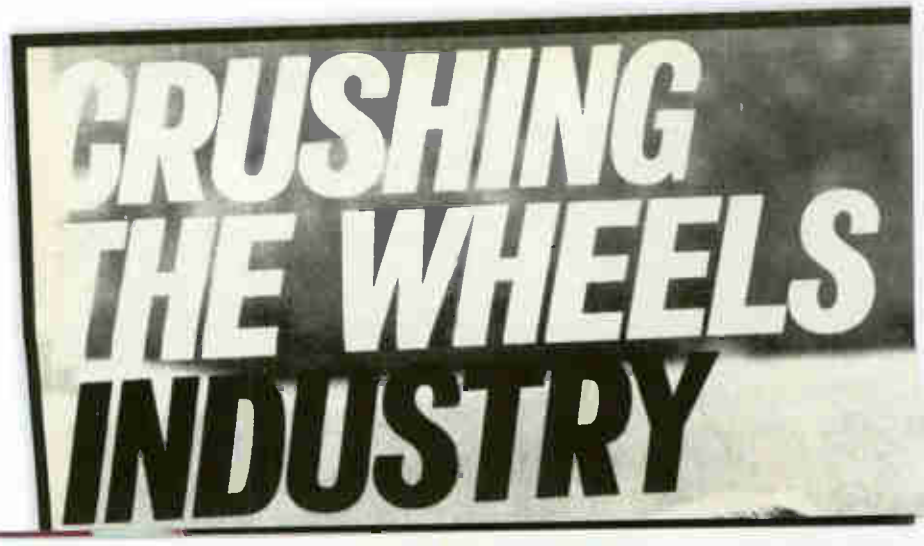
If the left is to capture the popular imagination, it clearly must find new, exciting images and approaches, learn how to vault into the video age, play personality politics. But Depeche Mode are not "the left". They are a pop group. As such, they are not trying to attract votes, merely win some attention, and hopefully a sympathetic response.

In the context of contemporary pop, The Worker does represent a powerful image, not least because it disrupts the apolitical complicity and glossy surface of the industry.

But it can only do this for a moment, and not much more. Popular music has a remarkable capacity for trivialising serious subject matter, for reducing even the most threatening images and stances to the common denominator of entertainment – sharp content weathered into blunt style. Surely the punk experience has shown us how easily left-wing politics is incorporated into "rock mythology", made subservient to it.

Still, even if Depeche Mode are not deeply committed to their lyrical concerns, there is at least a robust sense of sincerity behind their feelings. Depeche Mode are an individual and increasingly abrasive pop group at a time when the anodyne reigns supreme.

Long may their pop-with-plugs spark. *Lynden Barber* •



adolescence imaginable. But all things becomes quite laughable. Because I wasn't handicapped in a traditional way. I didn't have any severe physical disability; therefore the whole thing sounds like pompous twaddle. I just about survived it, let's just say that."

Nevertheless, it seemed that even with all this behind him now, he remained as a writer clearly preoccupied with states of isolation, dreams of transcendence through flurries of pain; the notion that, in the end, the weight of the world could not be shared, would have to be borne – and why not proudly? – on lonely shoulders.

"Yes," he said firmly, without hesitation. "I'm very interested in the idea of being alone, and people being isolated. Which is the way I think most people feel at the end of the day. It's a general condition under which most people live, and I often feel that it has something to do with death. Because one is ultimately alone when one dies. Even though you might be surrounded by people, nobody can understand how you're feeling.

"It's like when you're critically ill and people try to nurse you to health and assist you. They cannot possibly understand how you feel. And even if somebody kind of sits in the bed and slaps a comforting hand on your forehead and says, 'Yes, I understand...' it doesn't matter. You're still feeling the illness and you are still on your own.

"It seems that in the very, very serious and critical things in life, one is absolutely alone. People kind of trundle through life with this very merry idea that they're not alone. And because they have a partner and because they marry or have these supposedly concrete relationships, they are not alone, and there's another person with whom they can share everything, that there are always these two people in this mystical communion.

"But I think that it's somewhat of a lie, and I think that even though the world is frenetically overpopulated, people are still quite profoundly isolated."

He had more, of course, to say on the subject, and like virtually everything he had to say on anything, it was uncommonly sensible, thoroughly engaging, often touching in its persuasive sincerity.

But, as I say, this all came later.

THE HOTEL ROOM was small, harshly lit, anonymous; it bore no evidence of the lives that had passed through it. Morrissey was sitting on the bed, elbows on the pillow, waiting to deal with still more questions about The Smiths and their recent, dramatic ascendancy: 50 minutes had been clawed out of that evening's predictably hectic schedule to complete the interview. Outside the hotel room, fat knuckles of rain rapped down onto Reading's shivering head; The Smiths still had a gig to play at the university, where the local reporters, knee-deep in trailing coils of microphone wires and tape spools, had huffily demanded exchanges of banter that Morrissey, on his way from the soundcheck, had politely declined.

These days, everyone wants a part of The Smiths. These last months since they appeared on the cover of *MM*, and Ian Pye confidently predicted the kind of success they are currently enjoying, have been exhilarating and potentially exhausting for the group. Since December, when Andrew Catlin's verdant *MM* cover shot beamed out from magazine stands, The Smiths have been a ubiquitous presence in virtually everyone's pages. And, last week, they had "What Difference Does It Make?" and "Hand In Glove" in the national Top 40; both those singles and "This Charming Man" in the independent Top Five; and a debut LP, already praised to the hilt in these columns for its unassailable emotional whack, apparently poised to burst dramatically into the album chart, with advance orders that Rough Trade estimate should qualify for a silver disc.

The Smiths, rather clearly, aren't hanging around for anyone's blessing: they're out there making things happen for themselves. Which is the way it should be.

Predictably, Morrissey has taken most of this in a stride so confident it could quite probably straddle worlds, his only regret being that more people don't, to use his own words, thump through the attention that surrounds him and simply talk to the rest of the group; to Johnny Marr, who plays the guitar and writes all the music for the group's enormously affecting songs, or Andy Rourke who plays bass, or Mike Joyce who plays drums with the unaffected simplicity of someone tuned into the perfect beat.

Morrissey's democratic concern is understandable and honourable; but after talking to the rest of The Smiths for several hours following the Reading gig, it emerges that he's their own reference point; they generously point to him as their qualified spokesman, harbour no resentments that he's become a public focal point for their ambitions. They are funny, bright and engaging themselves – the provocative Marr, especially, could hold his own in any popular debating arena – but Morrissey, somehow, for all of them, is the elusive key to The Smiths' arresting hold on a popular imagination that might otherwise elude them.

So, we return to this hotel room, this conversation, and Morrissey, fingers dampening sprouts of acrobatic quiffs, telling the reporter that he hasn't been at all surprised by any of the attention that group has recently attracted.

"I could never say that," he said, his deliciously soft northern accent rolling across the bedspread. "Because I had absolute faith and absolute belief in everything we did and I really did expect what has happened to us to happen. I was quite frighteningly confident. Because it seemed like a confidence that had no real place within the whole sphere of popular music. And, if it occurred in any diluted form, it would have been quite dangerous and it would have been spat upon.

"Therefore, if our confidence had been diluted, I would've felt somewhat like a target for the critics' barbs as it were, and what I had to say would have been construed as boring arrogance. If the music was weak and there were enormous blemishes on what we did, I'd feel very silly and I'd obviously feel very vulnerable. It would become almost like a very dull pantomime. But since I actually believe in what I say, I want to say it as loud as possible. And if that falls on dangerous ground, well, that's the way of the world and it's a great tragedy, because it perhaps would halt us in our tracks, and I believe that, at the end of the day, the records we produce have a tremendous value.

"I think," Morrissey elaborated, responding to a request to do exactly that, "for the first time in too long a time, this is real music played by real people. The Smiths are absolutely real faces instead of the frills and the gloss and the pantomime that popular music had become immersed in, as a matter of absolute course. And there is no human element in anything any more. And I think The Smiths reintroduce that firmly. There's no facade, and we're very open and we're simply there to be seen as very real people.

"Also, I think the lyrics that I use are very direct and, as I often say, I feel the words haven't been heard before. It's not the usual humdrum terminology. It's something quite different. I could never use words that rhymed in a very traditional way. It would become absolutely pointless. So everything I write is terribly important to me. Similarly the music is terribly fundamental. But not in a sheepish or unworthy way. It's very strong, in fact. It's like saying, 'Look, you don't need all this fabrication, you don't need all this quite, quite, phenomenal equipment.' It's the way you use the basic utensils, like talent."

I wondered for just how long Morrissey had nurtured this enormous and not at all disagreeable faith in his own idea of The Smiths and their music.

"For too long!" he replied with a flourish that nearly set the curtains on fire. "And this is why when people come to me and say, 'Well, it's happened dramatically quickly for The Smiths,' I have to disagree. I feel as if I've waited a very long time for his. So it's really quite boring when people say it's happened perhaps too quickly, because it hasn't."

There seemed no doubt to me, as the author of last week's thoroughly impressed review, that The Smiths deserved to be whatever they wanted to be. I had a feeling, though, that some of Morrissey's bugle-blasting announcements on the relative worth of The Smiths might somehow detract from the qualities of the group's music, which was eloquent enough to speak for itself.

Of course, Morrissey had already thought this through: "I think people can spot fakes quite easily," he said, unruffled. "And the big bores in the music industry, people laugh at them and chuckle along, but at the end of the day, we really know where everybody stands and we really know everybody's value. Everything has to be taken into account, not just the fact that I stand on the table and say, 'YES! The Smiths are absolutely wonderful.' So, looking beyond the quotes, people must surely see that there are reasons why I say these things and I'm not just dreaming out loud."

It seemed to me that Morrissey still ran a distinct risk of ending up sounding like a kind of Interflora Bob Geldof, all mouth and tulips.

March 16, 1984: (l-r) Andy Rourke, Mike Joyce, Morrissey and Johnny Marr perform "Hand In Glove", "Still Ill" and "Barbarism Begins At Home" on Channel 4 music show *The Tube*

"Of course that would be the worst possible thing that could happen!" he squirmed, visibly aghast at such comparisons. "But because I'm interviewed so much and in so many ways I'm almost always asked the same questions, when these things emerge in print, it constantly seems as though I'm saying the same things all the time, and I could quite imagine that boring people to death very quickly. So it's really just a harder job for me, and I have to think about things a little bit more. But, again, that's just one of those wonderful dilemmas.

"I mean, I can't see any benefit whatsoever in being absolutely mute or really having nothing to say or having no opinions whatsoever. And regardless of what one says, there will always be someone in the shadows ready to point and sneer and spit. And you could say something that would appeal enormously to one person, but another person could see it as absolutely hysterical buffoonery. I feel quite comfortable, really, with the way things are, and I still have some degree of confidence in the future. Nothing's changed."

> "When you're detached and sealed off, you have a very clear view"

MORRISSEY HAD BEEN written about so much recently, in such a variety of contexts, that I wondered whether he'd begun to lose sight of himself. Did he still recognise the portraits drawn of him by so many inquisitive journalists, all of whom must have thought they'd cut through the bluff to the tremor of bone?

"Perhaps in a few paragraphs," he said, "but most of it is just peripheral drivel, and a misquote simply floors me. I really can't survive being misquoted. And that happens so much, I sit down almost daily and wonder why it happens. But the positive stuff, one always wants to believe, and the insults one always wants not to believe. When one reads of this monster of arrogance, one doesn't want to feel that one is that person.

"Because," he continued, nosing ahead, "in reality I'm all of those very boring things: shy, and retiring. But, simply, when one is questioned about the group, one becomes terribly, terribly defensive and almost loud. But in daily life I'm almost too retiring for comfort, really."

What do you do when you're not working with The Smiths?

"I just lead a terribly solitary life, without any human beings involved whatsoever," Morrissey said. "And that to me is almost a perfect situation. I don't know why, exactly... I'm just terribly selfish, I suppose. Privacy to me is like the old life support machine. I really hate mounds of people, simply bounding into the room and taking over. So, when the work is finished, I just bolt the door and draw the blinds and dive under the bed.

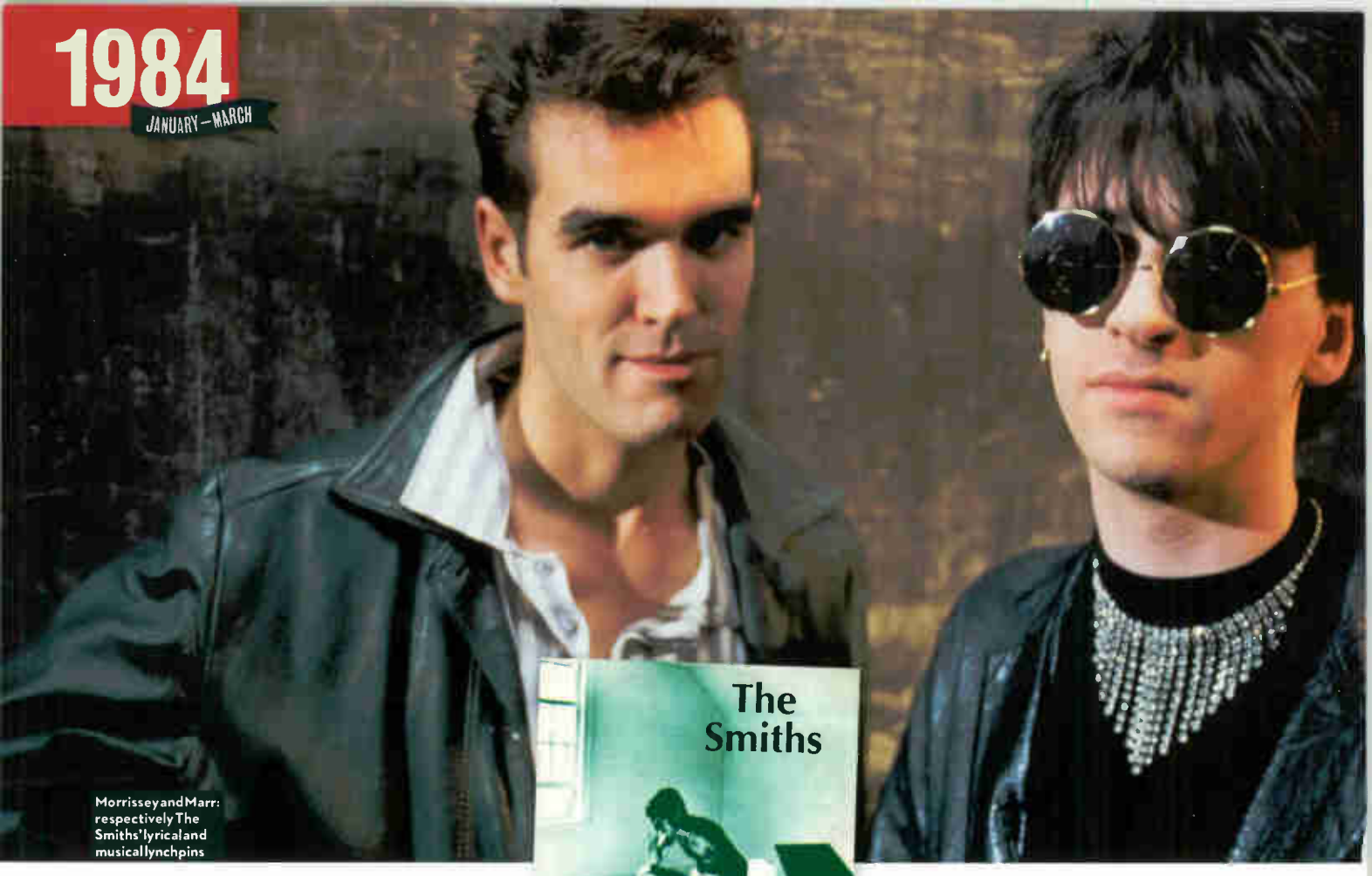
"It's essential to me. One must, I find, in order to work seriously, be detached. It's quite crucial to be a step away from the throng of daily bores and the throng of mordant daily life."

The aloofness from the spit and blood of the daily grind, this assumed separateness from the graft of living, seemed at odds with the sense of communion and compassion for the victims of life's deadly circumstances that he articulated to such an unforgettable effect in many of the songs on *The Smiths*.

"But in a way," Morrissey argued, with a weight of conviction I knew would be difficult to deny, "the two are probably combined. I find that people that are knee-deep in emotion and physical commitment with human beings, I find they're often totally empty of any real passion. Simply because one is closely involved with human beings doesn't mean that you understand the human race in a serious, sensitive way. I find that it often takes people who are totally detached from much that is considered commonplace to really make strong comments about these things and to really say things that make people stop and think. I mean, if we look back on the history of literature, it's always these really creased, repressed hysterics, if you like, who are enchained in these squalor-ridden rooms, who say the most poetic things about the human race. And you often find that the life and soul of the party, the person with all the punchlines, had just nothing of any consequence to say about anything.

"So I think it takes that detachment because, when you're detached and sealed off, you have a very clear view of what's going on. You can stand back and you can look and you can assess. And you can't do that when you're totally immersed in people." »

PETER CRONIN / REX FEATURES



Morrissey and Marr: respectively The Smiths' lyrical and musical lynchpins

In this context, it seemed that Morrissey's self-proclaimed celibacy, his abstention from sex, his withdrawal from physical communication, was more integral to a general creative philosophy, as a way of coping, perhaps, than it might appear to the kind of cynical eye that would immediately equate any such admission with a totting up of column inches, an eagerness, in its way, for publicity.

Or maybe Morrissey was simply frightened by the kind of physical involvement, frightened by sex, the sweat and tears, ecstasy being more easily imagined than achieved by effort or technique, and celibacy was a state of mind and body that evaded responsibility to another person.

"It's not really fear," he replied. "I just don't really have a tremendously strong belief that relationships can work. I'm really quite convinced that they don't. And, if they do, it's really quite terribly brief and sporadic. It's just something, really, that I eradicated from my life quite a few years ago and I saw things more clearly afterwards.

"I always found it particularly unenjoyable," Morrissey says of sex. "But that again is something that's totally associated with my past and the particular views I have. I wouldn't stand on a box and say, 'Look, this is the way to do it, break off that relationship at once.'

"But, for me, it was the right decision. And it's one that I stand by and I'm not ashamed or embarrassed by. It was simply provoked by a series of very blunt and thankfully brief and horrendous experiences that made me decide upon abstaining and it seems quite an easy natural decision."

There are some records, some songs, some twists of lyric and melody that can make you feel that the substance, the very fabric of your life, is being disrupted, enlightened, touched by an inspiration that won't easily be erased.

These are the kinds of music that most of us listen to when, somehow, for reasons best kept to ourselves, we feel like we're falling out of windows, or simply spent, or rotten, or badly used, by lovers or friends, when we're crawling face down on the carpet, eating shit but looking for romance, for a taste of times that have passed us by and the people that went with them. And the best of this music will remind us not only of what it was like then but of what it will be like again. This kind of music transcends time, contravenes even the most reasonable contexts.

For my own part, the music that twists my tail in these moods includes... well, no names this time around, let's just say that, last year, REM's *Murmur* joined the list. This year, The Smiths' *The Smiths* is alongside it, for songs like "Pretty Girls Make Graves", "Reel Around The Fountain", "Suffer Little Children" and "The Hand That Rocks The Cradle", songs that will whistle down the years.

But that week, the papers had been full of other people's opinions about the album. Since Morrissey's lyrics and Morrissey's voice had coloured any interpretation of the LP, what did he think of it?

"I'm really ready," he said, "to be burned at the stake in total defence of that record. It means so much to me that I could never explain, however long you gave me. It becomes almost difficult and one is just simply swamped in emotion about the whole thing. It's getting to the point where I almost can't even talk about it, which many people will see as an absolute blessing. It just seems absolutely perfect to me. From my own personal standpoint, it seems to convey exactly what I wanted it to."

And why would you tell people to buy it in preference to anything by Duran Duran, say, or Culture Club or Simple Minds?

"Oh, I dunno," Morrissey laughed. "I don't think I should say anything else. I think I've been snotty enough already." *Allan Jones*

— MELODY MAKER APRIL 14 —

WHEN THE WORLD looks these days at The Smiths, it seems to only have eyes for Morrissey. This doesn't worry Johnny Marr, even though it's the clear emotional flight of his melodies, the haunting twang of his guitar, the subtle shapes and cutting edges of his arrangements that sets the lucid gallop of Morrissey's imagination in its most emphatic musical context.

"The attention people pay to Morrissey is, after all, just a reflection of the general interest people have in The Smiths," he explains, admirably patient. "We all know what we contribute individually to the group, we know that The Smiths is the four of us – Morrissey, me, Mike and Andy. The Smiths, the idea of The Smiths as a group, is bigger, more important than any one of us.

"Just because Morrissey ends up on the covers of the music papers, that doesn't mean we're going to be jealous of him, you know. That would be petty. That's just a disgusting trapping of old rock-star attitudes. Honestly, The Smiths are beyond that.

"We've always hated the idea of, like, rock stardom. It's such a pathetic waste of time, it's not even worth thinking about. It's such an old-fashioned attitude – it should have been buried in the '70s along with a lot of the other crap that really soured music during that period. I mean, if you believe in rock stars, you're just going to be disappointed, you know. It's like when I was 12 or 13, I had all of these rebel idols like the Stones, you know, and at that age you really idolise them, you really think they're

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kicking authority in the teeth, just by having the nerve to be the Stones. Then you turn around and you find Mick Jagger hanging around with, like, Princess Margaret. I mean, what's the point? You can't idolise people like that, it's just desperate.

"That's why, I think, people believe in The Smiths. We are unique in that we're just four individuals and we're not afraid to say that we're vulnerable, we're just four human beings who go through the same daily chores that people who buy our records go through. We don't put on any act, we don't adopt a persona that says, 'We are The Smiths.' We just are. This is us, there's no great mystique.

"That's why I think we're really getting back to the original inspiration for making music. Right back at the birth of this phenomenon called pop music, music was a way of bringing young people together and inspiring them. That's exactly what we're trying to do: we're trying to get back to old values that have been lost. I don't want to be, like, a revivalist or sound nostalgic, but that kind of, I dunno, innocence, if you like, has been lost. Too many people, even these days, like seven years after punk is meant to have destroyed all this, too many people still want to be stars. All they can think about is hit records and money and being famous.

"They've just forgotten all the reasons for making music in the first place. They're just wrecking the beauty of music, which is what The Smiths want to get back."

The musical click behind The Smith's recent, spectacular ascendancy, Marr is small but perfectly garrulous, animated, like Morrissey, whose gift of the gab he so conspicuously shares, by a single obsession: The Smiths and their claim to greatness.

"I suppose," he says, "that people might get bored with Morrissey telling everyone how good The Smiths are, but I feel exactly the same way as he does. I think The Smiths are the most brilliant, phenomenal group there is right now. I really do. And I don't see why I should hide the way I feel.

"I don't think we're second to anybody. Like, when we turned down this tour with The Police, people couldn't understand it. But why should The Smiths support The Police? We're already more important than The Police will ever be."

WHEN JOHNNY WAS 14 and an aspiring young guitarist whose ambition was already stretching the credibility of most of his teenage contemporaries, he met these people, a couple of older Manchester musicians, actually, and they knew Morrissey. And these friends of Johnny's, who also knew Morrissey, told Johnny that Morrissey wrote words to songs. Johnny remembers reading some of Morrissey's lyrics; he won't talk much about them now, though he will admit they made such an impression upon him that four, maybe five years later, he could still remember them all vividly.

By then, Johnny's musical education was pretty much complete: he'd been in and out of various groups, had written more songs than most of these groups had incompetent fingers to count them on. Frustrated, that's what he was. Johnny knew that he needed a partner: someone whose imagination and scale of ambition matched his own. Morrissey was the man he was looking for, so he tracked him down, walked up to his front door, rang the bell and waited for an answer.

"I was pretty confident that he'd like me," Marr recalls, "but I was worried in case he thought I looked too outrageous. I had this really silly haircut at the time – this quiff. It looked like I had a French loaf sticking out of me head. I was afraid he'd think I was some kind of Gene Vincent freak. All I knew about him was that he'd written a book about the New York Dolls, so I was quite prepared to spend a bit of time talking about them. But after about three minutes of being in his flat, I realised that would be irrelevant. We just seemed to have so much else in common, it was amazing.

"I remember when he answered the door, I just laid this heavy jive on him. I just spoke even faster than I am now, like 300 words a second. I just said, 'This is how Leiber and Stoller got together,' and he invited me in. I dare say he'd come into contact with people who wanted him to be in groups before, so I wanted him to take me seriously, so I said, 'Look, the time is right for a fantastic new songwriting partnership...' The idea that we wouldn't get on just didn't enter my head. Before he even heard me play guitar, we had ideas for about four songs. I was just singing melodies, and he was already coming up with ideas for lyrics.

"When I walked into his room, he just said, 'What music do you like?' And I told him, and after every single group I mentioned, he just went, 'Yeah, yeah...' I couldn't believe it. I could have gone in there with all this spiel and if it hadn't worked out I would never have done it again with anyone else, 'cos I really opened up and he did the same, I think. He just got this amazing vibe off me.

"From then on, we kept in contact all the time. We just had this tremendous belief in ourselves, and since that day my life has totally changed, and I know Morrissey's has, too. Right from the beginning we knew it was going to be brilliant."

One of the first lyrics Morrissey handed over to Marr was for "Suffer Little Children", a chilling evocation of the Moors Murders, for which Johnny supplied one of his most elegant and compelling melodies.

"That impressed me massively," he remembers, "when I first read that lyric... It's probably a self-indulgent little story, but the first time we ever recorded our songs, we went into this little studio in Manchester one night and started recording at about 11.30 and went straight through to 6.30 the next morning. We did 'The Hand That Rocks The Cradle' and 'Suffer Little Children' in, like, two takes. I played guitar and bass and this drummer who was a friend of ours just stumbled his way through. But when we played the tracks back, we were just overwhelmed. 'Suffer Little Children' especially. The more we played it back, the more touched we were. It was the first time me and Morrissey realised what we could do together. Like, all the time we'd been writing together we knew we had the conviction and confidence and the ability and the talent to put these gems together, but this was the confirmation of it all. Listening to that playback of 'Suffer Little Children' I really heard for the first time the beauty of Morrissey's voice. Since then we've never really looked back.

"We were always really confident," Marr continues, recollections, opinions and fleeting asides spinning ever faster. "When we first played in Manchester we supported Blue Rondo A La Turk, and a lot of people just turned up to see if we'd fall through the stage. I knew the Blue Rondo audience wouldn't give us much of a chance, so we went out there to be aggressive, I think. I really had this attitude of, 'I know you people just want to stand around the bar posing, but LISTEN to this, you're not going to hear anything like it again.' We were really threatening. I think we had to be at that particular time.

"We were aware of our own excellence and we wanted to make everyone else aware of it. I think to a certain extent we've established that now, but yeah, of course, that creates a sort of pressure. People expect so much of us now; we've set certain standards and we obviously have to live up to them. It's a pressure, but it's not really a problem, you know. I think we can rise to any occasion, make it an event every time we play. It's not beyond us at all.

"There haven't been that many groups who've had the same kind of acclaim we've had in such a short period of time, but to be honest, I think we really deserve it. It's not arrogance that makes me say that, it's a real belief in The Smiths. I listen to our songs more than I listen to anyone else's. The music we make really pleases me. When I see a new lyric of Morrissey's, for instance, I feel really glad to be part of this group. This is what I've always wanted to do. It's the only thing I can take seriously, music.

"And I always think if I take it that seriously and I'm prepared to give it everything I've got, the audience will see that, they'll know that we really mean what we say and they'll believe in us just as much as we believe in ourselves. And that's vital, that the audience feels part of what's happening. We're not just out there on stage to amuse ourselves or to be applauded just for turning up, you know. The audience is a real part of everything we do, and we'll never lose sight of that.

"I'll tell you something," Johnny Marr says with a final flourish, "when the audience is really behind us, The Smiths play like devils..." *Allan Jones* •

> "We're already more important than The Police will ever be"

People don't know what to make of THE STYLE COUNCIL. To help explain his anti-ego, non-dilettante mission for good music, Paul Weller brings along his minister of information, The Cappuccino Kid. "I grew sick of rock," says Weller. "The bands are just wankers."

"I try and involve everybody"

— MELODY MAKER MARCH 24 —

I WAS **READING THE** *Daily Mirror* when Paul Weller bounded into the room, grinning. "'Ullo Adam, I've got a surprise for you." Oh yeah? A bucket of water, perhaps?

"No," said Weller. "You know you're always slagging off The Cappuccino Kid?"

Um, yes.

"Well he's here. Thing is, you're not allowed to see his face 'cos he wants to preserve his anonymity. I thought it would be quite funny for you two to confront each other."

The ever-changing Weller was obviously becoming capricious in his old age. In fact, the staff of the Maker Motel hadn't expected him to speak to us at all after an unpleasant incident at the start of the year when PW, incensed by frivolous remarks about his haircut and him being Spokesman For A Blah Blah, had seized a telephone and frightened half the office to death with threats of reprisals.

Luckily the mood had passed, and here we were over at his record company the day after the opening night of The Style Council's mini-tour. The Cappuccino Kid (for it was he, or so »

BRIAN RASIC / GETTY

"We don't want to be categorised": Paul Weller in 1984

they say) was sitting behind a giant cardboard cut-out of Sergeant Bilko, his back to the room. I pointed out that it would be difficult to confront somebody who was (a) invisible and (b) had his back to you, but the Kid had been thinking about this one. "Paul has to face a lot of bullshit, right, he's a superstar, he has all that hassle. I want to avoid that if I can. I thought I'd just cut through the crap, you know what I mean? I find by keeping my identity a secret I can do that."

The Kid clearly wasn't Paolo Hewitt, as many of us had suspected. In fact a glance behind his protective screen suggested that he resembled Clive Gregson from Any Trouble, which isn't too flattering I know, but there it is. The Kid says "man" a lot and has probably been reconstructed from old Colin MacInnes novels.

Nobody seems to know when Paul's being serious nowadays, I told the Kid, and your writings on his record sleeves fall into the same bracket. Are people reading it supposed to say "this is a pretentious load of shit" or...

"I know, but man, does that matter as long as the kids think about it, eh?" queried the unseen scribbler.

But you can use that argument to justify anything, even *Sounds*.

"Yeah but man, you interview Saxon, man, right, you get some band like Saxon – what have they got to offer? Their music and that is it, *maan*. You get a lot of parts with The Style Council, right, and this is just one of the many facets of the character of the group."

A browse through the new Style Council LP swiftly bears out this statement, if only because the thing is so chaotically diverse it takes some time to work out which way is up. And of course The Cappuccino Kid has filled the accompanying booklet with his meanderings (though in fact there's a little bit about God in there which is quite droll).

The question is, what is The Style Council?

On stage, Paul Weller comes and goes from song to song, switching from guitar to bass to keyboards. Mick Talbot, meanwhile, is all over the music with his piano and Hammond organ. Everyone's demanding to know who's in charge here!

On the *Café Bleu* album, what are we to make of the Michel Legrand strings and smooch guitar (by Paul) on "Blue Café" or the moody balladry of "You're The Best Thing", or the explosive be-boppery of "Dropping Bombs On The Whitehouse"? Then there's bits of funk and a slab of rap. To put it another way, can you learn to love a compilation album?

Weller says: "I just wanna make music, really. There's too much music made where people push their ego before their music, and too many people concentrate on the image or the artist's ego, rather than their music. And I just find that really boring.

"I think it's good that The Style Council shows aren't just all me, that it isn't Paul Weller and some backing musicians. I try and involve everybody. The whole point is, people should just come and listen to good music, y'know, not because it's me or something."

The Cappuccino Kid on all that jazz: "Well, firstly it's like presenting jazz as a music where you sit in a rocking chair and listen to it, which is fucking preposterous. I mean that's one aspect of it.

"And the other thing is like on the album and the music the guys are doing now, they're not being precious, it's saying, 'This is just music, so listen to it. We don't want to be categorised, like, this is jazz' – you know what I mean?"

The Kid, sneakers ever in search of cool, takes care to name-drop Miles (Davis) and Nina Simone in the *Café Bleu* booklets, but insists that "kids need references, man". Paul, are you hip to the sound of jazz?

ALBUMS REVIEW 1984

Conservative Council

MM MAR 17 An eclectic but traditionalist debut album.

The Style Council *Café Bleu* POLYDOR

Some pile of styles, this... It's immensely ironic that the man who did so much to keep the beacon of rock alive in the late '70s and early '80s should now be so disgusted with the form that he can barely mention its name without a spit and a sneer.

Actually, I'm not so sure about "ironic" – it's closer to outright hypocrisy. This is surely a good example of psychological projection – the transfer of one's "crimes" to another person. Why else would those who profess to most hate rock music be the ones who have previously been most hung up on it?

That aside, Paul Weller's decision to come clean, own up to artistic stagnation and venture into unsettled waters has to be welcomed. The question we have to tackle next is: just how adept is he at his new job?

On my reckoning The Style Council have made a fairly mediocre though reasonably agreeable entrance into the pop arena. "Money-Go-Round" bounced around pretty neatly, thank you, but it was hardly a single many of us will want to remember in another 12 months as an example of some of the better things happening in 1983. If there's anything the new soulboy style of Weller has told us, it's what we know already – the man is a dyed-in-the-wool traditionalist, even conservative (small "c", please note), whether he's dealing in the currency of rock, soul or even jazz.

No, I haven't made a mistake, for jazz is clearly the direction Weller is steering in on one side of *Café Bleu*. My first instinct on hearing three-quarters of this LP was to stand up and applaud, for this is nothing but an unsafe record, one likely to perplex yet more of the old Jam fans still in search of the lost power chord.

But is this as much dilettantism as eclecticism? Just as the faithful get accustomed to that softened-up Motown pastiche, their hero switches direction again and starts laying down some beatnik jive about cafes and saxophones. Like, uh, dig this, man... five instrumentals on the album, three of them among the first four tracks; only two Weller vocal performances on this first side; a black rapper taking over the opener on Side Two. What next? An album full of reggae? Country & western? Blues?

Well, let's look at the good parts. Firstly, the *Café Bleu* sequence at least achieves what it sets out to do – maintain a consistent smoochy, late-night ambience. Strings? We've got 'em. Languid jazz guitar? It's there. It also contains one of Weller's strongest ever ballads, "The Paris Match", handled with an extraordinary degree of sensitivity by Tracey Thorn.

Flip over and we find Weller has become the 20th-century schizoid man – "A Gospel" (which ain't) is as good as any black New York dance platter I've heard recently, the magnificent "White Lines"-style bassline cradling a mean hot-dog rap by one Dizzy Hite (haw haw).

After this, Weller's usual Woking-soul vocal style can only come as a let-down. "Strength Of Your Nature" is a good dance track, and "You're The Best Thing" pleasing within the limitations of his vocal, but having had the appetite whetted by "A Gospel" this isn't really good enough.

It's here we get to the crux of the problem – Weller's dreaded traditionalism ensures a vision of soul anchored solidly in the '60s. At a time when black popular music is particularly vital, thanks to the rap-electro-break-dancing scene in the Bronx, this seems ridiculously retrogressive, as if Weller has decided to offload the challenge of leading British pop into more thrilling areas on to the likes of Scritti and Heaven 17 while he plugs away happily at some under-achieved variant of kitsch. A mixed bag. *Lynden Barber*

"Let people write their own reviews": Style Councillors Mick Talbot and Weller scan the press for further "conservative with a small 'c'" calumnies

"Yeah," said Weller, "I used to detest it, but I just started listening to it a couple of years ago. I don't profess to know anything about it; I just know what I like. Some of it, I think the actual sound and feel of it's really, really good. The only thing I don't like about it is when it starts becoming intellectual."

> "People should come and just listen to good music, y'know, not 'cos it's me"

PAUL WELLER, SPRING '84 model, is showing distinct signs of liberation. The hardest thing to come to terms with is that this is the same guy who drove quite a well-known three-piece band up the charts with monotonous regularity and a locked-in, paid-up sense of mission. This boy was obsessed. Now, he's loose, cheerful and confident. I wondered why he'd let himself in for that exhaustive and entirely solemn interrogation in *NME* the other week, with X Moore and Tony Parsons.

"Yeah I know, it turned out to be everything I didn't want it to be," Weller sighed. "I predicted all of it – big black-and-white moody shot on the cover, the big confrontation thing, and inside we talk about punk rock, politics and religion. It's the same interview I've been doing for the last seven fucking years."

Mentions of the press are guaranteed to trigger an outburst from The Cappuccino Kid, who finds the papers hatefully dull, peopled by hippies with bald heads and moustaches who can't dance. Not true! I saw Lynden Barber dance once, and he may be a hippy but he certainly isn't bald. Speaking of whom…

"Was it Lynden's review of the album which mentioned that I'm very traditional and conservative with a small 'c'?" asked Weller. "That really gutted me, that, to be thought of as being a traditionalist. I can't see that, really.

"Whenever anybody tries to do something different, everyone automatically thinks it's gonna be avant-garde, which to me is just bullshit. Why can't you still do something different in the normal kind of structures and frameworks of pop music? Which is what I feel we've done with the LP, without having to resort to being really far out, y'know? I really don't see how you can say it's conservative."

How about Joe Strummer and his new-deal Clash, then? Does that strike you as a tragic thing to do, keep on flogging away in that old vein?

"Whenever I've seen Joe Strummer he's always been very friendly to me, and I quite like him," said Paul. "I think he's genuine, he's either a bit naive or he forces himself into that position of being naive. But I think to myself, 'Why bother?' really, 'cos whatever Joe calls it with the new lineup and new approach and that, it's still revival whichever way you look at it. I remember all the punks used to take the piss out of Teddy boys 'cos they were still rock'n'rolling, and punks have become a bit like that now."

I traded a few insults with The Cappuccino Chap ("You're writing a load of crap," "So's yours, *maaan*" and so forth) until Paul came back in. I think he was a little disappointed that the Kid and I had failed to come to blows, but no matter: "You've got to get pop music into its right perspective," said Paul. "I've been thinking about this a lot recently. I'm not saying I'm blameless for this, 'cos I'm not at all, but you've got to get it into perspective.

"Such a small percentage of the population listen to pop music, that it's nothing, a piss in the ocean. And I agree with the Kid, I think the press do take themselves too seriously. What are we all fucking talking about? There's things happening in the world. I'm not just talking about the music press, 'cos I think the bands, including myself, are equally to blame.

"We should be a bit smarter and fucking see through all that music-business crap. I think if you're enthusiastic about something, then you should write about it. If you think something's shit, then don't write about it. Ignore it until it goes away."

Love to, but unfortunately there aren't enough people around worth writing about on that basis. We do have a paper to publish, y'know.

"I don't know why you can't leave it blank and let people write their own reviews," said Weller craftily.

Perhaps he'd like to review Billy Bragg, currently appearing in The Style Council live shows twice nightly? »

BRIAN RASIC / GETTY

Where there's Mick there's brasserie: Talbot and Weller pose for a studio portrait in London

'I think he's really good," said Paul. "I wasn't 100 per cent convinced when I saw him before and heard his record, but I watched him last night doing his second set and I was completely won over. I thought he was really good. The main thing that comes through is that he's so honest. People might sneeze at that now, but I think it's deadfucking important. I think that kind of warmth he's got is great as well."

A lot of people think he sings like you.

"Well, he probably won't like this, but some of his songs remind me of mid-period Jam, like *All Mod Cons*. But I really like 'im a lot."

The Kid was getting bored behind his cardboard cut-out. "He's not my cup of tea at all, man – he just Braggs too much for my liking."

"Are you sure you're not a journalist?" asked Weller. "That sounded like a *Melody Maker* pun."

ANYWAY, THE CONVERSATION turned to accusations of dilettantism which have been levelled at Weller, thanks to the sunburst of styles available on *Café Bleu*. My own feeling is that the problem is merely one of pushing it that extra yard – the patchy nature of the album is eclipsed when you get a glimpse of the full scope of which the project is capable on a good night on stage. I think Weller's got his new framework almost right, and now he just need to grow into it.

Paul says, "This dilettantism thing I think is so much fucking bullshit. It's just ridiculous to me."

But can't you see why people would say that?

"What, because of all those different styles? Can't they just hear the beauty in that, all those different things? We don't sit there and go, 'Come on, let's do a bossa-nova song now.' Do you think we'd do anything as crass as that? If I come along with a song and we start playing it, it just depends how it develops, y'know, simple as that."

In particular, Weller has found working with boy-wonder drummer Steve White (who's only 18) quite a revelation. From bop to funk, the boy is always at home and has the athlete's gift of time – he never sounds like he has to hurry.

"It's opened up a whole new world, all these different things," Weller admitted. "'Cos I mean I've been brought up on pop music, y'know, and

MIKE PRIOR/GETTY

it's quite a sheltered world really. I used to dismiss jazz and classical music, it was all just pop, but I've woken up to a lot of different musics in the last two or three years – apart from rock music and heavy metal.

"I saw Lynden's little bitchy thing about how I'd made all my thing out of rock. I've never denied I've played rock music, and The Jam were a rock band. I just grew sick of it, just the same as you might grow sick of wearing them trousers one day. I don't think I need to justify that.

"I will shy away from rock now, because I don't think it's got us anywhere. I don't wanna play rock music or be involved in it any more, because I don't think it progresses people anywhere. It's just a load of big fucking empty words and theatrical gestures that do fuck all when it comes down to it. I think a lot of people behind it and in the bands and that are just wankers."

Weller stresses that he makes no claims for The Style Council as social commentators or political activists. But did he ever really believe in rock music, and its power to make that kind of impact?

"I used to, yeah, of course I did. The whole reason I started playing music when I was 12 or 13 was because of The Beatles. My impetus was from them, so I was brought up on all that and I did believe in it. Now I don't."

Did it take a lot of bottle to knock The Jam on the head?

"Yeah. I was kind of tempted by the security of it as well, it was a very secure situation, but it was also that security that frightened me. To be that secure, it's frightening – like saying to someone, 'This is what you do for the rest of your life.'

"I know a lot of people have got to do that, a lot of people have got to stay in jobs they don't fucking like 'cos they've got to pay the bills, but I'm not in that position. I'm lucky enough to have the choice, so I use my choice.

"We did things in a very straightforward way with The Jam, and we do things differently with The Style Council. I don't think you can say we didn't do things straight in the live show, because we just went out and played; it wasn't smug or smart or anything."

It's been a slow and painful process, but out of the apparent stumblings and often clumsy attempts at humour of The Style Council, something is beginning to emerge which nobody could have foreseen. Recent interviews have suggested that Weller is happy just to make the music he likes, regardless of anybody's opinion, but he's quick to point out that this isn't entirely true.

"It's not really like that. I don't mean to be as arrogant as that, but all I'm saying is I can't see the point in catering for tastes, which is equally as bad as being conceited about everything. It's so crass when people do that; you've got to follow your own instincts. If it feels right to you and you think it's good, then you've got to go with it. If people agree with it then great, and if they don't it's one of them things. Anything less than that is just not worth it."

> "We don't sit there and go, 'Let's do a bossa nova"

INTO THIS DETERMINED but harmonious view of the world, The Cappuccino Kid wished to insert a little homily of his own, and who am I to deny you, the reader, the opportunity to study the Kid's godlike genius at closer quarters? It goes like this...

"I wonder if you could print this, right?" the Kid began. "It's a little story, right? A cat goes into a shop, right, and he buys a packet of Jelly Babies, right? So when you open up the packet, what do you see?"

Er... lots of colours?

"Yeah right, you get a green one next to a black one next to a yellow one. Have you ever noticed anything about those jelly-babies? They don't fight – they just fucking get on great. One day I'd like to see the world a bit like that. It sounds silly, but that's the kind of thing that kids pick up on."

The Kid insists he is a naive idealist, though I suspect he may be a practising cynic in disguise. The Kid argues that if he were a cynic he'd be a journalist, a bitter and twisted attitude if you ask me.

Anyway, here's a parting shot from Weller. "I don't know what reason the crowd came for last night, but they were listening, that's for sure. I think it's just a question of us going out and doing it until everyone gets the idea of it. I just thought there was a real fairness in the audience towards us." Sounds like a head start for happiness. *Adam Sweeting* •

GAUMONT SOUTHAMPTON/ — DOMINION, LONDON — LIVE! — MARCH 13/15 —

"I enjoyed every minute of it"

MM MAR 17 Live, The Style Council nail it second time round.

HALFWAY UP THE M3 from Southampton, 'round midnight, I bumped into Billy Bragg and his entourage in a squalid motorway services – sandwiches and instant coffee only at that time of night. Bragg had just played his first gig with The Style Council.

Andy Kershaw, from Sincere Management (who handle Bragg), had been watching from the side of the stage when Paul Weller came and sat next to him.

Kershaw had been amazed. "He was askin' me, like, what did I think of the show and the way there were no gaps between acts, and had I enjoyed The Questions? He seemed dead friendly, and I couldn't believe it – I thought, 'Why is he asking me?'"

The Southampton show had been a bit of a shambles in some respects. "Everyone was bricking it," Weller confessed afterwards. "In the first set I forgot all the words to one song, I was just so nervous. I just had a mental block, it was terrible. And on another song I was supposed to be playing bass and I walked off stage.

"I was standing in the wings and the other bassist [Anthony Hart] was off stage as well, and he was going, 'Shall I do it? Shouldn't there be somebody out there playing bass?' It was terrible. I settled down a bit in the second half."

There had still been room for a few surprises, like Weller's guitar-and-sax treatment of "The Whole Point Of No Return" and an ambitious but enjoyable encore of "One Nation Under A Groove".

Clearly, Weller had hired some very plausible sidemen – the Billy Chapman/Chris Lawrence/Stewart Prosser horn section swung and punched with commendable force, though Steve White's drums were strangely inaudible and Jaye Williamson's vocals on "Paris Match" were wooden and badly tuneless. Frankly, there was plenty of room for improvement.

A couple of nights later at the Dominion in London, he proved much of this to be correct. With Weller obviously much more in command and wisecracking about the need to say, "It's great to be back in London", the 10-piece Style Council turned in a forceful "Ever Changing Moods", a wonderfully gospelly "It Came To Pieces In My Hands", and a sharp but relaxed "Dropping Bombs On The Whitehouse", complete with wristy fills from Steve White. And that was just the first set.

By the end of the night, they'd added an elastically rhumba-like "Me Ship Came In!", with Weller on bass, plus a much-improved "One Nation...". For the first time, I reckoned I had a clear view of what The Style Council was supposed to be about.

"I'm not saying I'm a great musician," Weller had told me, "but I think I'm pretty good really. A lot of that comes from the punk thing, 'cos it was embarrassing to be able to play well. The Jam used to get a lot of stick in the early days down the Roxy, a lot of the crowd used to hate us 'cos we played in tune and we took time to tune our guitars and things. And we had a bit of a complex about that – well I did, anyway, like, 'That's just fuckin' bullshit, I wanna be able to play, I wanna get better as a musician. I don't wanna be crap, I wanna be the best.'

"I've got a bit of that back. I think I'm a really good guitarist, and I think I'm better now. I gave it a break for a year, and I've got so much better. Same with playing live. I just did so much live I got sick of it and I started getting very jaded about playing and very cynical towards it, so I gave it a break for a year, and now... last night I just enjoyed it so much. I enjoyed every minute of it, y'know? It's just great to get that feeling back, that enthusiasm for it." *Adam Sweeting*

December 31, 1983: resynchronised man Sting fronts The Police at Wembley Arena

A little black sun up in the spotlight

NME JAN 7 As their frontman drifts towards the esoteric, The Police continue their pop rock primacy. But for how much longer?

RICHARD COOK'S EXTRAORDINARY vision of The Police [*NME*, December 2] prompts one to reconsider the profound difference between The Police – those awful sing-along-a-suicides "So Lonely" and "I Can't Abide Your Infidelity" – and The Police – the resplendent beauty of the last two albums.

Cook does overplay his hand, it must be admitted. There's nothing very "impenetrable" about The Police, and still a few things that grate. Sting's pinched roots wail is often little more than a mewling hash of Bono and Jon Anderson (like Bono, he goes in for a lot of this "ey-yo-yo" nonsense to sound that note of messianic exhortation) and his lonely-man-in-search-of-truth act can be a bit of a drag, too.

How much longer Sting can play this peroxide Man Of Sorrows it will be fascinating to see. I can accept that if you're the biggest white pop star on earth you're gonna need a little something to get you thru' the night – a toss-up between Jung and cocaine, really – but I'm not sure I buy Sting's resynchronisation of himself wholesale.

How much longer Sting can play this peroxide Man Of Sorrows it will be fascinating to see

That said, The Police are in pretty fine fettle.

In performance, the Sting of "One World" and "O My God" does not entirely engage me, though the latter almost turns into a soul stomp. It could just be the Mad Max-goes-New Romantic togs that fail to convince, but the routine of performance has caught up with him. His little-boy-blue antics and gestures towards rock theatre look tired. A forced affability ill-masks the gulf between the man and his audience. He is so very serious a fellow, is he not?

Tonight's audience does not observe this distance. A younger bunch, from the "Don't Stand So Close" days, might have sensed it, but Nottingham's smoothly square young adults are here for the tunes they made out to before the first down-payment. They are not here for "King Of Pain".

I think Sting knew what he was doing when he sacrificed the UK teenybop market, though a tiny, fierce clutch of girls is here tonight. From being a saucy schoolmaster, Sting was suddenly this angelic hunk who wanted to save all you brimstone'n'treacle tarts from the pain of false love. So that you should not end up as Roxannes, you were required to read *Modern Man In Search Of A Soul*.

From this angle, Sting is the only romantic still prowling the global video network: hence a mass exodus in the general direction of Duran Duran. Adolescents aren't terribly romantic.

Sting's a little like Bowie in the ways he avoids plunging into the abyss of narcissism. They both get interested in the same things, the same sort of film parts, in order to close up that eternal gap between self and image. (In the old days, it would have been personalised gurus.) The difference between Sting and Bowie is that Sting does appear to have suffered a little. One only hopes he won't Exit the Koestler way.

The music at Nottingham is superb, natch. Three toy-drummer girls in tights fill up the spaces in The Police's marvellously free and fleet-footed songs, from the jazz-funked Yes of "Synchronicity I" to the macabre, twisted jazz of "Murder By Numbers". Stewart Copeland works his vast panoply of surfaces as though guiding us on a tour. (I liked what he told Cook about feeling more of an anthropologist than a participant.) He frequently overdoes things, but every little one of them is magic. This one-man dub machine is always beautiful to watch.

Andy Summers has a low-key night, but there's a gorgeously glassy passage in the middle of "Tea In The Sahara" where he really comes into his own; "Walking In Your Footsteps" he laces with flinty, glinting runs that recall the Jerry Garcia of "China Cat Sunflower".

The lighting is consistently awesome: aquatic neon blues and greens, dry ice billowing through shafts of red and orange like sunset in a rain forest.

For Mr Sumner, though, there's always a little black (almost invisible) sun up in that spotlight, an ethereal zone where he really is a free spirit and we truly are immaterial. In the classical grace of "Every Breath You Take" (a "nasty little song" that sounds like a hymn to the shades), he crowns himself king of pain once again, and once again gets away with it.

But he has only come here seeking knowledge. *Barney Hoskyns*

GRABBED BY THE FUZZ! (OUCH!)

THE POLICE

global video netw
mass exodus in

"We're a luxury thing"

Paddy McAloon's PREFAB SPROUT offer an alternative to "vague" and "mood"-based rock. But they're realistic about what they can do. "If you want the whole world to adjust to accommodate your record, you're talking out of your backside."

— NME MARCH 17 —

THE BOY'S A natural-born charmer. When, for example, I confess that actually I quite like that group Echo & The Bunnymen, he stops, vaguely puzzled.

"Oh, right, right. I see. No, no, that's great. Fine..."

Paddy McAloon is also one of those rare birds who can string together words of more than two syllables and at the same time part his hair or fill a glass of water.

Thus do we find ourselves in a Newcastle hotel on the eve of the release of *Swoon*, the first album from the group Prefab Sprout. I don't envy young Macaroon. For a while it's seemed as though the entire future of civilised songwriting hinged on his pen-nib, and some of us have watched as yet another group's reputation is built up to wavering heights, only to be whisked from under their feet just as they've got something to show for it.

Already people are sticking the knives in, saying it's all too twee and tuneful to meet whatever challenge it is that pop is supposed to pose in March 1984. I have my own reservations – can't take the forced freshness of Paddy's voice, would've liked a sound as quirky as the songs themselves – but *Swoon* remains a fascinating, highly accomplished work that requires and repays several more hearings than one gives to an average first release. »

PENNIE SMITH

Prefab Sprout's core trio in 1984: (l-r) Paddy McAloon, Wendy Smith and Martin McAloon

Paddy McAloon: "I'd say the emotions are better served by Richard Rodgers than they are by Simple Minds"

If you have to work a little harder for Sprout than for U2 or Simple Minds, is that such a bad thing?

Swoon stirs up the whole question of The Song, arguing that there are feelings in life which require more complex musical responses than most rock and pop can offer.

Adapting music to lyric rather than the other way round, McAloon's songs push beyond the straight supply-and-demand of emotion, the inundating passion of rock. Songs like "Elegance" and "Technique" explore the movement of feelings, observing changes in perception and working the listener's own thought processes as great poems do.

OFTEN HE GOES too far, and the melodies become strained and obtuse, but when it works, the risks are more than justified. McAloon knows that emotion cannot be reduced to repetitive hook phrases. Because these songs steer away from the kind of chord sequences that trigger off reflex responses, because they refuse to probe the pleasure dome, they make you think.

Mining the strange seam between verbal meaning and textural sensation with a new kind of precision, they not only reach back to Sondheim and Steely Dan, but extend forward beyond Costello and Roddy Frame.

The best example is undoubtedly "Cruel", a perfect vehicle of doubt and a model of restrained melancholy set to a soft jazz shuffle of brushes and vibes, about a boy whose head is telling him not to feel jealous – he's anti-sexist and "*too cool for the macho ache*" – but whose heart has just started to break.

Using the framing device of "Lions In My Own Garden" – reference to the blues – the song compels our desolate hero to see the contradiction between the way he feels and the way he tries to rationalise his pain: "*If I'm troubled by every folding of your skirt / Am I guilty of every male-inflicted hurt? / But I don't know how to describe the Modern Rose / When I can't refer to her shape against her clothes / With the fever of purple prose.*"

The simple skill of "Cruel" is that it examines what emotion is.

It's this skill, too, which makes McAloon a sitting target for those closet rockists who secretly want everything to be the first Clash album over and over for the rest of eternity. On the basis of *Swoon*, I'd defend Prefab Sprout's right not to be The Clash to the death.

Paddy recovers from a mild fit of coughing.

"What guides me in trying to write a song is – what is the most valuable thing you can do for yourself and for people? What are the things you can write that are gonna last? Life's too short for me to listen to U2 and Echo & The Bunnymen, you've got to go where it's best, where people are getting the closest to something.

"At one end of the spectrum is the vague school of rock, where you're trying to conjure up a 'mood', dealing with atmospheres, like Jim Kerr, and you know what they mean, but it's altogether too vague. At the other end is Elvis Costello, whose lyrics you can trace back to specific subjects.

"It's very difficult to describe what lies in-between, but for me, you always try to crystallise a moment that you had when you were young, listening to a record before you could actually analyse its components and say what made it good. Jimmy Webb's 'Wichita Lineman' was one such song for me, because there was something about it which went beyond 'Oh yes, that's a pretty tune and I'm aware of it on the radio'.

"Now, when you write a song, you're trying do that and you're using a set of tricks to do it with. You have to perhaps cheat yourself every time, you have to trick yourself out of self-consciousness and find a way of communicating some sort of emotional content, aware all the time that if you start writing songs that go "*I love you / Do you love me?*", you're playing with a million other ghosts, they're there and you're embedded in them, and to give them freshness is the hardest thing of all."

Especially with "the love song".

"Yes. Nowadays when I write a love song, I try and put love in some other context. I've got a song called 'I Am A Plumber', where I tried to write about love from a plumber's point of view. You have to, in a sense, unglamorise love, because it is the hardest thing to describe, which is the essence of love. "I can't use these forms, because they've been used so many times they're now so threadbare and meaningless. As a writer you're up against 40 or 50 years of every cliche of every watered-down variation on love."

Curiously, for a writer who has so obviously refused rock's easy options, Paddy perceives no absolute rift between The Riff and The Song. Jim

Kerr's swirling atmospherics derive from the same genus as his own fragmented pieces.

"There's absolutely no divide, that's the most interesting thing. You have 11 shots at it, at whatever you want to have a go at, and that's the same for everyone. At the same time, I don't imagine we share the same kind of constraints as Simple Minds.

"I don't want to sound like the Luddite Morrissey, and after all we have synthesizers on *Swoon* too, but I would imagine that Simple Minds find themselves more limited by the instruments they use. I like to think you can go for that atmospheric thing and yet may be more precise lyrically."

IT'S THE NOTION of precision that fascinates McAloon and which has led him in the past to sounding a mite fetishistic about yer Sondheims and Hal Davids, as if writing pop songs were really science and he himself were about to be elected to some pantheon of geniuses in the great Brill Building in the sky.

"That's the risk you run when you mention these characters, because it then becomes, 'Aha, with this person technique is all.' If I mention those guys, it's because they had none of the artistic bullshit that you're likely to find in bands like ourselves! I use Sondheim as an example because I don't hear anywhere else the excellence, that sheer moment of naked *ability*. I'm talking about what makes it possible for one man to run 20 times faster than another.

"It's hard to talk about, because so many people aren't aware of it, they don't have the antennae for it, they don't hear the difference between McCartney's melodies and Elton John's."

Lévi-Strauss said that melody was "the supreme mystery in the sciences of man".

"Yes, it's an area you can't get close to when you're describing how a song is about men without women, or about the Falklands or whatever, but I would still say the emotions are better served by Richard Rodgers than they are by Simple Minds or Tangerine Dream, or whatever kind of vague, poetic rock music you want to go to.

"If I dwell on this picture of Richard Rodgers knocking out a couple of songs before lunchtime, I say that out of sheer awe that the guy's attitude was purely businesslike, that he said he'd never once waited for inspiration to strike. I marvel at the fact that he was a fatty in a suit and yet he was a genius, he went way beyond any of these people with their fabulous intentions. But I also think a lot of people maybe have this gift and just don't try hard enough, and I'm sorry if that makes me sound like a schoolteacher."

Prefab Sprout seem to have been built up as almost the ultimate post-Postcard group, a bit of inadvertent hype that Paddy wants to shake off.

"When Keith [Armstrong] started Kitchenware, he admitted straight away that he liked Postcard bands and that he'd modelled himself on Alan Horne, but he knew where all the failings were. Myself, I really don't feel anything in common with that. Someone comes up to me and says 'Lions…' is a Postcard record, but to me it's a Beatles record.

"I come from a totally different set of references. It's a different world, and I think *Swoon* will blow that whole Postcard thing away, just because of the range of writing and the range of instrumentation."

What about these people who accuse you of playing into the hands of our cosy student contingent with their CND badges and their little stash of pot? Is it important to care who listens to your music? Should you don angry guitars to alienate the safe people and make them angry?

"A certain writer was telling me all this and somehow he neglected to include the bit where I said, 'But you're only describing your own problems.' Of course I'm aware that our record is lined up alongside all the other records; of course I'm aware of the students and the Good Music Society, but you've got to grow up. You've got to see that it's fantastic to be doing something you enjoy and getting paid for it.

"If I stop writing songs tomorrow, it's not really going to matter to many people, we're not the miners or something. We're a luxury thing, and you've got to have some sort of perspective on it. There's a Yiddish saying that Jonathan Cott once quoted to Bob Dylan in an interview, which went: having won something, be prepared to forget and win it all over again. If you want the whole world to adjust to accommodate your record, you're talking out of your backside.

"That whole attitude is such a rocky, music critic's attitude. There's nothing radical or subversive about it, it's just immature. You devalue your currency if you turn everything, every performance, every interview, into a gesture."

What is the main musical criticism that people will make of you?

"I imagine there might be a criticism that we're picking and choosing from different styles, but nowadays I think that's the game. I think Top 40 radio is to the white kid what the blues was to Elvis Presley. There's so much available, such a variety of things, that it turns into this one massive thing behind you.

"Also today, I believe one has to get away from writing songs about pop music. You can't write soul records about passion, you have to write about bedspreads and coffee cups … passionately."

Isn't *Swoon* quite an odd title for a record which is so dry and cool? It reminds me of *Sulk*, a record for which the title *Swoon* would have been far more appropriate.

"It's the classical and romantic dichotomy. We fall on the classical side. However, I've always thought the classical approach to be the most swoonworthy. It's like you can talk about The Staple Singers, and of course those voices are far more passionate, far more direct. The point is, white boys have to use different tricks, and ours is a kind of elegance; the problem being that some people might find it too measured."

Maybe you should have called it "Spoon" – spoon in June with Prefab Sprout.

"Well, since you mention it, our next LP is called 'June Parade'."

Are there any doubts about *Swoon*?

"I could've envisaged a bigger sound. Some of the things we did on it were slightly rushed, but I don't think it's a boxed-in independent sound. I'm not saying, 'Oh dear, we would have done it so much better', but maybe when I put on *Thriller* and hear how they weren't limited to one kind of synthesizer, maybe then I hope that one day I can compete with Michael Jackson on that level.

"Also, and I know it's sort of a damning thing to say about your own work, but compared with Michael Jackson or Brian Wilson, we're all of us, Elvis and Roddy and The Smiths and myself, so sensible, such moderate people. With Jackson, everything is so pure, so visionary, there's so much attention to detail. Nothing gets in the way, his music is total. If Jackson or Wilson or Spector had been making this LP, they'd have spent a year on it."

> "I believe one has to get away from writing songs about pop music"

Could you give us one final quote, something we can stick in a box?

"Sure. I guess we're somewhere between Rickie Lee Jones and Einstürzende Whatsathingy."

You could say Prefab Sprout are outside the Postcard lineage because they're so clearly not influenced by The Velvet Underground. You could argue that anyone who thinks *Swoon* is too clever has a lazy ear. Or you might find yourself back with our old model of depth and shallowness: ie, Prefab Sprout are deeper than Simple Minds. Personally, I abhor that, and yet I know that in some way *Swoon* plunges deeper into me than does "Speed Your Love To Me".

Obviously one can't quantify why it is that Mozart is more intelligent than James Last. There's no empirical evidence. But when you get right down to it, Paddy McAloon is doing more inside your average three minutes than the rest of the pack manages in the space of whole albums.

The devil might have all the best tunes, but standing against the magnificent towers of Durham Cathedral, this bespectacled Catholic boy looks like a winner. *Barney Hoskyns* •

1984

APRIL – JUNE

THE BLUE NILE, REM, COCTEAU TWINS, THE ART OF NOISE AND MORE

"Some life in the old bat yet"

MM APRIL 21 Sandie Shaw and The Smiths hook up. "I just love their songs," says Sandie.

HAND IN GLOVE? Well, hand in hand, actually. Of course, it's former '60s barefoot girl Sandie Shaw alongside leading Smith Morrissey. Shaw and Smiths have just emerged from a studio collaboration clutching copies of Sandie's version of "Hand In Glove", a highly improbable partnership, no?

"I thought The Smiths were right nutters when they started writing to me, I couldn't figure out what it was they wanted," Sandie confessed. "Then they sent me some tapes and my husband said I ought to meet them, so I did!"

Morrissey, it seems, kept pestering Sandie until she agreed to a collaboration of some kind. "I just love their songs, they're so good to sing," she bubbled. "I said I'd go into the studio with them on the proviso that if I didn't like the result we'd scrap it – but we had so much fun and I think the single's great."

Evidently the persuasive Morrissey helped Sandie overcome the legendary shyness which has been known to lead her to beg interviewers in mid-conversation not to print anything. But will she work with the Gladioli King again in future?

"Mmmm... maybe," she pondered. "I don't like to plan things in advance and my motives now are just to enjoy myself. There's talk of an album, so we'll see. Knowing Morrissey, he won't give me a moment's peace until we're back in the studio."

Of course, things have moved on a bit since Sandie won the Eurovision Song Contest in 1967 with "Puppet On A String". Apart from a guest slot on BEF's *Music Of Quality And Distinction* and a fleeting stage appearance alongside Chrissie Hynde, Sandie's kept well away from the music biz. She's written a couple of children's books, is planning a documentary on women in music for the BBC and now has a 15-month-old daughter to go with a teenage one from her previous marriage.

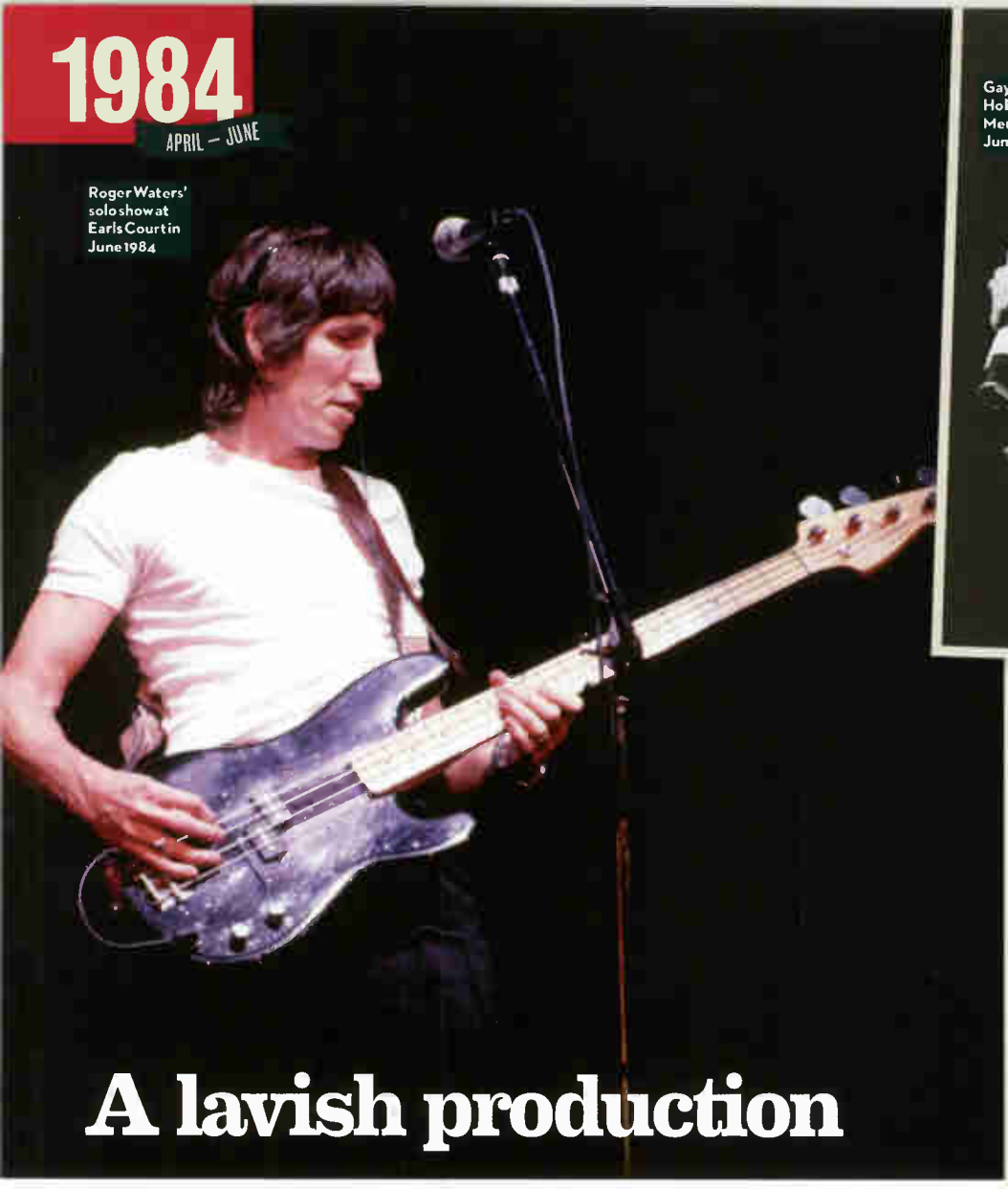
"I'd love to get on *Top Of The Pops*, mainly to prove to my teenage daughter that there's some life in the old bat yet! We're very close – we wear each other's clothes and all that, but I think she's still faintly embarrassed when I start boogieing round the supermarket."

Meanwhile, this 'women in music' TV thing sits close to Sandie's heart, though she won't go into details. "I've always been interested in the role of women in music and how they cope," Sandie explained. "I've got such admiration for people like Chrissie Hynde and Annie Lennox, who do it with such style.

"Chrissie's a friend of mine – she lives round the corner, we were pregnant at the same time. It was funny really – she seemed to think I was a pregnancy expert 'cos I'd done it before. I kept telling her it was so long ago that I'd forgotten."

Meanwhile, next stop *TOTP*? Much stranger things have happened.

"There's talk of an album": Sandie Shaw and Morrissey



Roger Waters' solo show at Earls Court in June 1984

A lavish production

MM APR 7 Roger Waters enlists old pals to present his debut solo work.

ROGER WATERS – the founder member and driving force of Pink Floyd – is to release a solo single and album during April.

And he's lined up a 10-date European tour to promote his new work, which includes two appearances at London's Earls Court and Birmingham's NEC.

The single is entitled "The Pros And Cons Of Hitch Hiking" and it comes out on EMI's Harvest label on April 9. A video, shot on location in Europe and America by film director Nic Roeg, will accompany the release.

The album, also entitled *The Pros And Cons Of Hitch Hiking*, is released by Harvest on April 30. It features a host of guest musicians, including Eric Clapton (lead guitar), Andy Bown (organ and 12-string guitar), Michael Kamen (keyboards/orchestral arrangements), Andy Newmark (drums), David Sanborn (sax), Madeline Bell, Doreen Chanter and Katie Kissoon (backing vocals), Raphael Ravenscroft, Kevin Flanagan and Vic Sullivan (horns), plus the National Philharmonic Orchestra.

The album was produced by Roger Waters and Michael Kamen. The live shows kick off in Stockholm on June 16 and the English dates are: London Earls Court (June 21, 22) and Birmingham NEC (26, 27).

The concerts will consist of two sections – a selection of some of the best-known songs written by Waters from the past 15 years, followed by the whole of the new album.

Many of the musicians featured on the LP are expected to play on the tour (including Clapton), and other session players likely to be involved include Mel Collins (horns) and Tim Renwick (guitar).

Waters has lined up a 10-date European tour to promote his new work

The live shows will be a lavish production, requiring six articulated lorries to carry the equipment from venue to venue. Gerald Scarfe, Mark Fisher and Jonathan Park – all of whom helped Floyd with *The Wall* show – are working on Waters' solo project.

Tickets are available now by post. Send a cheque or postal order for £10.50 or £9.50 (including 50 pence booking fee) payable to Harvey Goldsmith Entertainments Ltd, to RS Tickets, PO Box 4RS, London W1A 4RS. Enclose an sae and allow five weeks for delivery.

RICHARD YOUNG / REX FEATURES. PAUL NATKIN/GETTY

Gaye on stage at the Holiday Star Theatre, Merrillville, Indiana, June 10, 1983

"An altercation with his father"

MM APR 7 Marvin Gaye shot dead by his dad, a retired preacher.

MARVIN GAYE WAS shot dead in Los Angeles on Sunday, April 1. Gaye, one of the world's foremost soul singers, was killed during a domestic argument at his parents' home in a suburb of the city.

Reports from America have given differing accounts of the incident, but an LA police spokesman said: "All we can tell you is that 12.30pm on Sunday, his father and he had an altercation. His father obtained a .38 calibre revolver and fired two shots into the upper torso. Marvin Gaye was transported to California hospital, where he was pronounced dead."

The father, the Reverend Marvin Gaye Sr – described as a "retired Pentecostal preacher" – was under arrest as the *MM* went to press, and was later charged with the murder.

News bulletins have suggested that Gaye and his father had argued over money, eventually resorting to physical fighting which ended with shots being fired. Gaye's mother was reportedly present.

His sister is said to have accompanied him to hospital in the ambulance but he did not regain consciousness before his death an hour later.

In New York, DJ Frankie Crocker – an old friend of Gaye's – said: "We've lost a talented man who anytime could write music like 'What's Going On' which could touch everybody. He wasn't just a soul singer; he was a very talented man, a very talented writer."

Gaye, who died on the eve of his 45th birthday, became one of Tamla Motown's leading vocalists in the '60s with a string of hits, including the classic "I Heard It Through The Grapevine" and the internationally acclaimed album *What's Going On*. His popularity enjoyed a recent revival with the success of the single "Sexual Healing".

U2 in Australia for The Unforgettable Fire Tour, Sept '84

"In the air for a while"

MM APRIL 14 U2 to collaborate with Brian Eno on their fourth studio album.

U2 GO INTO the studio next month to record a new album – and, in an unlikely collaboration, they've recruited Brian Eno as their producer. Eno, who's previously produced Talking Heads, is known for experimental interests rather than mainstream rock production, but U2, who've worked until now with Steve Lillywhite (producer for Big Country, Simple Minds, Siouxsie and XTC) insist there will be no dramatic change in their musical style.

The album will be recorded during May in Eire. And it's scheduled for release in the early autumn, although no release dates have been considered yet. A spokesman for U2 said this week: "This collaboration has been in the air for a little while, but it's just been officially decided. This has all been very much the band's idea. I know they like the work Eno has done over the years. They've been big fans of his for goodness knows how long. So they decided to approach him.

"People might think, 'That won't work', but the possibilities are intriguing. I'm convinced the mix'n'match will definitely work.

"I don't think the sound of U2 will change radically by any means, but I think they'll move in wider directions... spread things out a little more. This album will be very interesting indeed."

U2 are currently "in transit" in Ireland.

Brian Eno, August 1984: helping U2 "spread things out a little more"

"Three 12-hour sessions"

MM MAY 25 Bowie wraps up film work, works on new album.

DAVID BOWIE IS currently at work on a new album – although his whereabouts remain secret.

And there's also news this week of more film projects for Bowie, as well as an announcement that he's finally turned down the chance to play a villain opposite Roger Moore in the next James Bond movie. At one point, it looked certain he'd accept the part.

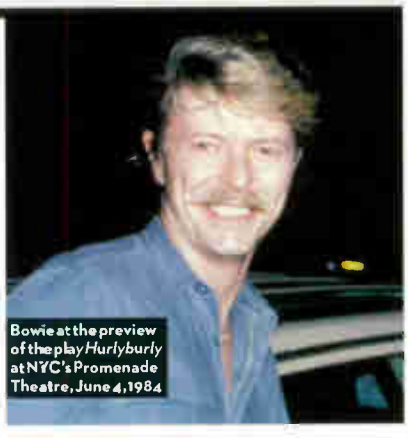
Though many of his film plans are being kept under wraps for the time being, it's known that Bowie has just finished filming a cameo role for a new Jon Landis movie called *Into The Night*.

"It was done in L.A in three 12-hour sessions," said a spokesman. "And it was all overnight work – in keeping with the title of the film. We've got no details about the role. All we can tell you is that David was sporting a moustache.

He's turned down the chance to play a Bond villain

David is also discussing some other film projects which we'll be announcing shortly. And it was because of those and his other working commitments that he turned down the 007 movie."

Jon Landis is currently at the centre of a court controversy in the States. He's being tried for manslaughter following the deaths of Vic Morrow and two girls during filming of *Twilight Zone* in 1982. They were killed in a helicopter crash. Among celebrities who've offered to speak for Landis in court are Eddie Murphy and Dan Ackroyd – stars of the film *Trading Places* – and Michael Jackson, whose *Thriller* video was directed by Landis.



Bowie at the preview of the play *Hurlyburly* at NYC's Promenade Theatre, June 4, 1984

➤ Lloyd Cole & The Commotions, a Glasgow-based five-piece, release their debut single, "Perfect Skin" on May 11. Available on Polydor, it's backed with "The Sea And The Sand", and the 12-inch version also includes "You Will Never Be No Good". The group comprises Neil Clark (guitar), Stephen Irvine (drums), former Bluebell Lawrence Donegan (bass), Blair Cowan (keyboards) and Lloyd Cole (guitar/vocals). *MM May 5*

➤ Bruce Springsteen is about to make his long-awaited comeback with the release of a new single – his first since "Atlantic City" in September 1982. "Dancing In The Dark" c/w "Pink Cadillac" comes out on May 14. Both tracks were written by Springsteen and produced by him in association with Jon Landau, Chuck Plotkin and Steve Van Zandt. The record features the E Street Band, comprising Springsteen, Roy Bittan, Clarence Clemons, Danny Federici, Garry Tallent, Steve Van Zandt and Max Weinberg. "Atlantic City" was taken from Springsteen's *Nebraska* album. The E Street Band haven't recorded for three years. *MM May 12*

REX FEATURES, RAY STEVENSON / REX FEATURES, RON GAELLA / GETTY, EBET ROBERTS / GETTY

Etta James at the Vine Street Bar & Grill in Hollywood, California, 1984.

SHERRY RAYN BARNETT / GETTY

"Something says keep on going"

NME APRIL 14 On one of her occasional visits to Britain, Etta James shares all about her rich, troubled past. "There's never a top... you never stop."

MOST EVERY YEAR now, Ms Jamesetta Hawkins – Etta to you – will, at the behest of Dingwalls boss Dave Goodman, fly over to these shores, pick up one of our most thick-skinned pick-up bands, and jam on down real mean at the last stop of rivvum'n'booze.

Which is all fine and dandy and more power to the Boss that he retains the simple faith in her pull to keep bringing her over. But when it's a case of piledriving into "Security" or "Tell Mama" or "Baby What You Want Me To Do" and you're wondering just where those golden-throated horns have got to, and all you get in their place is some wooden stump of guitar being tortured by a bandana-adorned relic hailing from halcyon Roundhouse days when Bees made Honey and Ducks were Deluxe, it's kind of... well, sad.

When there's at least two dozen lamebrain primadonnas on the American soul circuit who can take entire string sections on da road whenso'er the whim grips 'em, it's a little sick that Etta, surely the most powerful female voice of all time, can barely afford to retain a manager.

But all of this would be a reasonable cause for concern only if it made any difference to the mindblowing passion Etta is still capable of generating. Where most of these legend types just politely pussyfoot through medleys of moulding oldies in three-piece tuxes and Uncle Tom smiles, Etta sings: I mean, really gives it her all (which is quite a lot).

If you watch, you can see her thinking through every line, every turn of every phrase. It doesn't seem to matter that this is the thousand-and-tenth time she's done "I'd Rather Go Blind" (aka "Blind Girl") – once again she exhumes and brings it back to life, pushing the pain, turning it around, holding off the mic to hit that exact fading moment of loss.

"When I sing, it's just like a new experience to me each time. For the band, even; I never sing the songs the same way twice, so they can't depend on playing it in the same way.

"So each time, I'm discovering new things in whatever I'm singin' about, and everything I'm singin' I know about. You see, there's never a top, there's never that thing where you got to get to this place, because once you got there, it's only someplace else you got to go. You never stop, so you should never think you get so in that you got it made. If you get there, you ain't creatin' no more."

Thus the empress on her art. She granted me an audience that permitted just enough time to ask her what her life is about.

"I tell you, I don't like to answer dumb questions. I don't like to feel someone is just trying to check me out for being Etta James; I jus' like to have a rap about what's happening. I guess that's why I never did become a big star, 'cos as I was coming up, I never talked. My life was like a mystery. I didn't want to talk to nobody, I didn't want no film, I didn't want nothin'."

Briefly we point back to Johnny Otis and Modern Records, to Chess and Muscle Shoals, to a decade of heroin addiction, to Allen Toussaint and Jerry Wexler. Etta would be one of the undeposable queens of soul if she hadn't done so much, hadn't also been a rock'n'rolling jazzy gospel blues singer. They ain't no bag big enuff for the tuffest lover.

"Well, you think that's great 'cos you look at me as an artist, but that's been my problem, because there's been no category. I mean, can you say I'm a blues singer? Can you say I'm a pop singer? Can you say I'm rock'n'roll? In America, see, if they can't put you in a category, they don't know what to think of you."

"In America, see, if they can't put you in a category, they don't know what to think of you"

Maybe you never did enough of that pure deep stuff. What was the mid-'60s Muscle Shoals period like?

"Well, Rick Hall was a kind of a cat... I had never been down to that part of the South, and it was really a relaxed atmosphere. He was cool, a Southern cat. He didn't tell you what to do exactly, he'd just stop you if you overdid something or just give you an idea or two. He was one of the producers I really enjoyed working with.

"'I'd Rather Go Blind' would have never sounded like that if Rick Hall hadn't-a produced it, 'cos he was one of those ex-alcoholic cats who was on the brink of losing his wife. There was just something I liked about him – he had that survivor kind of thing."

What about the Jerry Wexler album, *Deep In The Night*? Only "Take It To The Limit" really came off on that.

"Jerry's the kinda guy that wants to produce all his favourite people, and I thought he did

one of the best albums that he could do with me. He took me into another area, another phase; he kinda took me back to the phase I was goin' for in the '60s, when I took Cole Porter songs and defied everyone by singing them with a bluesy feel.

"That's why Jerry picked country songs and stuff. I think it was more or less meant to show my versatility, and he brought me a whole new crowd. Sure, he overproduced on some things. I feel the simpler things are, the easier they are to understand, the clearer the words are said and the story is told."

It's been a decade since you cleaned up. What's it been like?

"It's been great, compared to what it was before. I mean, I don't have no money, I don't have as many jive surface things going, but I think I'm happier, I think I been doin' great.

"You know, to have come through that... and I have been working my way all the way, there's been no rest for the weary. And I don't get no kind of credit. When they run the rock'n'roll programmes in the USA, Etta James is not mentioned, just as though someone erased it from history."

What's seen you through?

"The real deal is the unseen, the unspoken... faith. In what I don't know, I don't want to say I'm this, you're that, in religion, but whatever it is it's like a supreme spirit, and I do deal with it, and I know it works. It's like, here I am, 30 years working, and I have nothing – I mean, what's happening? But still there's something inside of me that says, (*whispers*) 'Keep on going'... you know, like *Mission Impossible*, turn left, pick up the plans, keep going.

"Even after the drugs thing, I was starting to hear voices talkin' to me at night in hotels"

"Two years ago, even after the drug thing, I was still freakin', I was starting to hear voices talkin' to me at night in hotels, and I'm talkin' to them out loud, and I said, 'What is this? I'm goin' nuts.'

"And then I had a religious experience, and I knew what I was and I knew what I had to do. What I found was the same thing I had when I was a little bitty kid. If I could be quiet and listen, everything would be told to me. I find that I can ask this thing a question, and if I really want to know the answer, it'll tell me in some kind of way.

"It might sound nuts, but everybody's gotta have something. 'Cos if you had to go on what you see, you'd have gave up a long time ago, right?"

You'd be out on the streets again.

"Right."

What would you like to do?

"One of my main ambitions is to come over one day with (*whispers*) a great big ol' band, a big ol' Count Basie sound, like Otis Redding, and... blow everybody away."

She said it. *Barney Hoskyns* •

James in Fame Studios, Muscle Shoals, Alabama, with owner Rick Hall (right) and a member of the house band, 1967

GETTY (3)

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A CONSUMER

GRAHAM CHAPMAN

NME MAY 12

The life of a well-rounded Python.

Books

Labyrinths Jorge Luis Borges
Roads To Freedom
Jean-Paul Sartre
A Rebours JK Huysmans
Oxford English Dictionary
Life Extension: A Practical And Scientific Approach
Durk Pearson & Sandy Shaw
Lecture Notes On Pathology
Thompson & Cotton
Mr Norris Changes Trains
Christopher Isherwood
Gold In The Kingdom Michael Murphy

Other reading matter

Scientific American, New Scientist, Science Digest, Science, The Times newspaper (the crossword only)

TV programmes

All natural history programmes, **Butterflies**, Rod Hull and Emu, all quiz shows except for *Family Fortunes*

Films

Harvey, One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest, Death In Venice, Rocky Horror Picture Show, High Plains Drifter, Young Frankenstein, all Jacques Tati and most Woody Allen films, **All Quiet On The Western Front, Blue Murder At St Trinian's**

Musicians

Paul Young, Tom Robinson, Sting, Billy Joel, Ultravox, Klaus Voormann, John Lennon, Jimmy Shand & his band

Actresses

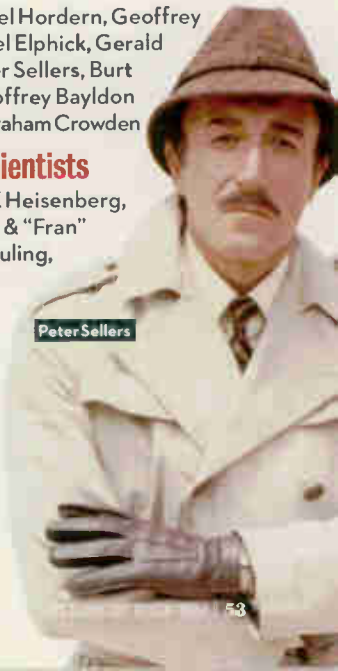
Irene Handl, Margaret Rutherford, Diana Quick, Beryl Reid, Jessica Lange, not Meryl Streep

Actors

Brando, Michael Hordern, Geoffrey Palmer, Michael Elphick, Gerald Campion, Peter Sellers, Burt Lancaster, Geoffrey Bayldon (*Catweazle*), Graham Crowden

Favourite scientists

Niels Bohr, WK Heisenberg, Jimmy Watson & "Fran" Crick, Linus Pauling, Max Planck, "Ernie", Lord Rutherford



Peter Sellers

Hate

Poor contraceptive technique

Poison

Ketamine

"I've always wanted to be immortal"

In Los Angeles, MARVIN GAYE is shot dead by his father. *MM* pays tribute to a major talent who wanted to become "the Frank Sinatra of soul", but would never conform. "I never learn. I wish I could stop believing in people..."

— MELODY MAKER APRIL 7 —

"I'm concerned about my music living way longer than I will. Hopefully I'll achieve that immortality I've been seeking. I've always wanted to be immortal" – *Marvin Gaye, June '83*

"I," SAID MARVIN Gaye once, "am unmanageable."

It was, perhaps, his one statement of real reliability, and there can be few whose lives he touched during his turbulent career who wouldn't wholeheartedly agree with it. Unpredictable, headstrong, fanatically independent, single-minded, occasionally bloody-minded, Gaye's intransigence was legend.

It led him into all manner of personal misery. Bitter public rows with his record label, Motown. Numerous painful contractual hassles. A couple of marriage breakdowns and expensive divorce settlements. Bankruptcy... Marvin Gaye had it all. Some finger of doom seemed to track him all the way, and there was a bizarre inevitability about the macabre manner of his eventual demise – two bullets from his preacher father, the same man who'd induced him into music in the first place, playing organ for the church choir.

The old cliche about genius is pain can never have been more glibly proven than by the unhappy story of Marvin Gaye. For, make no mistake, Gaye indisputably carried the touch of genius.

Not just the acknowledged classics – "I Heard It Through The Grapevine", "What's Going On", "Let's Get It On" and "Sexual Healing" – but in the manner that they were classics. Gaye was responsible for breaking the Motown mould, the "factory line syndrome" as he put it, and by doing so changed black music so irrevocably that he must be considered one of the ultimate greats.

And the most tragic feature of the whole sordid affair is that, at 45, with his voice in good shape, his will and determination cast-iron, and the confidence of a masterpiece, *Midnight Love*, recently under his belt, Marvin Gaye was strong again and vigorously capable of producing any number of brilliant works in the future. »

EUGENE ADEBARI / REX FEATURES

"Maybe I'll be a pop artist someday": Marvin Gaye in 1983

Marvin Pentz Gay Jr was born on April 2, 1939, in Washington DC. His musical initiation was based, ironically, almost entirely around his father's church. It was there he first sang at the age of three, and it was there he learned to play the organ, a musical education he took with him to high school, playing guitar, piano and drums in the school orchestra.

He had a short, unhappy spell in military service before getting involved in doo-wop groups, sometimes depping for Don Covay in Washington vocal group the Rainbows, and eventually teaming up with a couple of members of the Rainbows to form the Marquees. Bo Diddley proved to be an unlikely guiding spirit, engineering the group's signing to Okeh Records, a single, "Wyatt Earp", and getting them to back him on his own singles.

When the reasonably successful Moonglows split up in 1958, their leader Harvey Fuqua arrived in Washington to put a new band together, selected the Marquees en bloc, and Marvin Gaye was on his way. With the Moonglows, he played in Detroit, and was noticed by Berry Gordy, then in the process of setting up his own label. He married Gordy's sister Anna, thus sealing his own involvement in the embryonic Motown, a long relationship that was to prove as productive for both parties as it was stormy.

Gaye's early career with the label was modest enough: he was a session drummer and played and toured with, among others, Smokey Robinson & The Miracles. Gordy eventually gave his brother-in-law the go-ahead to make his own records, and his first single, "Let Your Conscience Be Your Guide", was released in May '61. It bombed, as did the next two singles, but the fourth, "Stubborn Kind Of Fellow" (featuring Martha & The Vandellas on backing vocals) earned him his first success, doing well in both the R'n'B and the pop charts.

During the next couple of years he worked with virtually every producer and artist on Motown, launching an amazing run in which his next 47 singles all charted in some manner. In '63 he linked up with Holland, Dozier and Holland for his first British success – the gospel/blues epic "Can I Get A Witness", and the following year scored a huge hit with the storming "How Sweet It Is (To Be Loved By You)".

He worked with Smokey Robinson for two big hits in '65, "I'll Be Doggone'" and "Ain't That Peculiar", but it was with the production of Norman Whitfield that he recorded, in 1968, the epochal "I Heard It Through The Grapevine", a song of such eerie majesty that it seemed to overpower anything else on Motown, or indeed any of the other material recognised under the burgeoning umbrella of "soul". The song had already been a major hit the previous year for Gladys Knight & The Pips, but the intensity Gaye added to the song was extraordinary. It went to No 1 in Britain and America.

Gaye was now an established hit-maker and Motown had already exploited his commerciality to the full by teaming him with a succession of girl singers: Mary Wells, Kim Weston, Tammi Terrell and Diana Ross. His duet with Weston, "It Takes Two", was a classic piece of soul, but it was his work with Terrell that was most dear to him. Heavy orchestral productions by Ashford and Simpson turned "Your Precious Love" and "You're All I Need To Get By" into romantic giants. This was when Gaye was struck by the first in a series of traumatic events. He was on stage with Terrell when she collapsed in his arms.

When she died in 1970 from a brain tumour, Gaye's notoriously erratic behaviour patterns began. Never a lover of live work, he now withdrew completely from the public gaze, becoming almost reclusive.

"I think there are men and there are MEN. There are men who're born and are strong enough to be sorcerers. Those who are strong enough to become sorcerers can certainly imply themselves to become warriors. Impeccable warriors. Impeccable sorcerers." *(Oct '76)*

"There are a lot of things I desire. I desire peace and happiness and love and understanding. That sounds so ridiculous to a lot of people. 'Who is this guy wanting all that? Another troublemaker.'" *(Oct '76)*

"I don't think the social content or the musical content is ethnic at all. I think it can apply to anybody, the entire album. Any race. Any creed. Anybody." *(On* What's Going On, *Oct '76)*

"I once had an album out called* When I'm Alone I Cry. *I'm not out to sound too sloppy and sentimental, but that could well have been a description of the way I felt when I first arrived in Detroit. Life wasn't going too good at that time, and when I came to Detroit you could say I was searching for something to eat." *(Feb '67)*

"I remember, when I was a kid, I used to have to sing a song every time there was company around at home. Then the visitors would give me a pat on the head and a kiss. Man, I hated that." *(Feb '67)*

WHEN HE RETURNED, his music had advanced to such a radical degree that it startled those around him. He'd changed, too, in his attitude towards Motown. He insisted that his work be treated as a special case and be accorded more than the usual slick, quick Tamla format record. No more, he told them, did he want just to make three-minute dance records – he wanted to say something.

What he said was *What's Going On*, a courageously ambitious cycle of songs that bitterly challenged the state of America... poverty, pollution, drug addiction, even Vietnam war veterans were all included in Gaye's scything social comment on the evils of American society. This, for Motown, for black music, for anything, was something new, and *What's Going On* became a crucial milestone for rock music and for black consciousness.

It also soured his relations with Motown, who were initially sceptical about the project and were reportedly reluctant to issue it in its original form. Gaye dug his heels in, the album was released and became one of the best-selling albums in the label's history – also producing three million-selling singles, "What's Going On", "Mercy Mercy Me" and "Inner City Blues".

Gaye had now proved that he could not only survive, but flourish without all the usual Motown machinery around him. The record also proved he was now much, much more than a regular soul singer, and Gaye now resolved to write, produce and arrange all his own work, and operate as independently as possible from Motown.

His next project was a successful film soundtrack for the movie *Trouble Man* – a terrible film but a great soundtrack, and one that Marvin declared himself fully satisfied with (a rare admission for a man who frequently decried his own work).

> "I have only scraped the beginning. I have a lot of music in me"

In 1973 he delivered another opus, and another brave departure. *Let's Get It On* was a celebration of... well... sex, actually. A smoky, steamy parade of vinyl erotica that delighted as many as it appalled, inspiring many accusations of sexism. Surprisingly sensitive, Gaye responded angrily to such criticisms, becoming more and more wary in his dealings with the press.

Further mass commercial success did, however, give him the confidence and the impetus to overcome his fears and appear on stage once more, breaking several years of silence to go on tour in '74... a tour documented by an excellent album, *Marvin Gaye Live*, recorded in front of a boisterous 14,000 audience in Oakland.

His behaviour, though, became increasingly idiosyncratic and there followed another couple of years of silence, during which time he was plagued by rumours of drug problems and domestic disputes.

It was 1976 before his next album, *I Want You*, and that was mostly written by Leon Ware, though he did venture out on stage once again to promote the record, including his debut appearances in Britain... a successful tour which opened with two sell-out concerts at the Royal Albert Hall in London. The UK concerts were also featured as three parts of a live double album, the fourth side being occupied by a long disco extravaganza, "Got To Give It Up", which was to become another transatlantic hit for him.

"At this point in my career, I feel I've achieved standing as a soul-pop artist, which is getting there. Maybe I'll be a pop artist someday. On one hand, I wouldn't like that to happen, because it suggests to some blacks that you've left those who loved and supported you first. On the other hand, I'd surely love to have the, oh, credibility of a large pop audience so that I can reach all the world's peoples. If I can bring a mega-class to my

April 5, 1984: Marvin Gaye is laid to rest at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, California

division, soul and R'n'B, which is low on the totem pole, and if I can become the Frank Sinatra of soul, that would be marvellous. I will have achieved something for my people." *(June '83)*

"I don't think the music business has treated anybody black right unless they become 'white'. 'White' black artists. We're resentful about it, but peaceful. I am certainly not aggressive in that response at all." *(June '83)*

HIS PERSONAL LIFE grew ever more complex. His marriage broke up in a welter of acrimony, his relations with Motown were abysmal, he was in financial ruins and was up to his neck in lawsuits (he owed $2m to his former manager Steven Hill alone). Small wonder he viewed the world with an increasingly bitter vision, though those around him who were willing to talk about him at all insisted he brought many of the troubles on himself, with his drug-taking and his general moodiness. A former Motown PR called Elaine Jesmer blew the gaff on Gaye with a book called *Number One With A Bullet*, which was ostensibly about a character called "Daniel Stone", who was evidently based on Gaye. A bigoted, slightly pathetic, if misused character he was too.

"I've been trying to appeal to other markets as I'd like to make it as big in this business as I can, but a negro R'n'B singer's chances are slimmer. Only Ray Charles has made it, and I don't feel that he's held in the same esteem as Frank Sinatra or Sammy Davis Jr. Although R'n'B, through young people, is making great strides, the older folk tend to stick to their pop singers, and so their kind of music is more successful." *(April '69)*

"I'm unmanageable. I'm my own worst enemy. I refuse to be manageable, and it sometimes gets me in trouble." *(Jan '79)*

DISILLUSIONED AND LEGALLY bankrupt, he split with Anna Gordy and went into the studio with a bizarre divorce settlement hanging over him. The deal was that Anna collected a large slice of the royalties (believed to be in the region of 80 per cent) for the album. With a perverse sense of humour, Gaye made it a double and called it *Here, My Dear*. Gaye insisted that he put his heart and soul into it anyway, "for my fans", but critical response was poor and the album is a shadow of his best work.

He was, by his own admission, promiscuous, but still felt hurt and betrayed by the split with Anna Gordy. If he was reckoned to be sour and unsociable before all this happened, then he was doubly so after it. He even publicly disowned his next LP, *In Our Lifetime*. He'd planned it as another meisterwerk à la *What's Going On* or *Let's Get It On*, a concept album built around the spiritual struggle between good and evil.

But Motown's patience with Gaye ran out. He used so much time and money making the record that Motown simply stepped in, confiscated the masters and issued the record, incomplete as Gaye claimed it was. He was furious and announced that he would never record for the label again, also commenting that their general meanness with studio time and money had prevented him doing his best work all along.

"I have a respect for music that very few musicians have, and it's difficult to find musicians generally who have the same kind of respect for music. And if I ever find those musicians, we will play music that the world will never forget as long as there's a world. And I won't do my music until I find them, and if I never find them my son will do it for me. I know that.

"I have only scraped the beginning. I have a lot of music in me. I have written a lot of music that's unpublished that I think is great. But I cannot afford to do it." *(Oct '76)*

AROUND THE SAME time, he confirmed his own lack of tact by failing to turn up to perform at a gala charity function at the Lakeside Club, Camberley, attended by Princess Margaret. Royalty was in place, but Marvin was in his hotel refusing to come out on some spurious grounds of "pride and dignity". Berry Gordy, on the phone from America, eventually managed to persuade him to put in an appearance at the club, but by then it was too late – the dignitaries and half the audience had already gone home.

About this and numerous other incidents, Gaye was unrepentant, insisting that great artists always live by their emotions, and compared himself with Bach and Beethoven, both great composers fired by their uneven temperament.

Maybe there was something in that. He made a lot of enemies, but his criticisms of Motown and the way they hassled him and financially restricted his art were to some degree borne out by the totally unexpected brilliance of his next album. With all the wrangles, the bad reputation and the break with Motown, most people assumed in 1982 that Marvin Gaye was all washed up.

But CBS signed him and he rewarded them with the superb *Midnight Love* and "Sexual Healing", one of the biggest and one of the best singles of the year. Buoyant again and seemingly reasonably in control of his faculties, Gaye was right slap back in the front line, playing concerts and relatively at peace with himself. There was every reason to expect that his next album would be every bit as good as *Midnight Love*, and in his last *MM* interview last year he spoke encouragingly of the future. He'd written, he said with a twinkle, a couple of real hardcore new songs he wondered if he'd get past CBS, called "It's My Duty To Spank Your Booty, My Masochistic Beauty" and "Sanctified Pussy".

Paul Young even had a massive hit with one of his old B-sides, "Wherever I Lay My Hat", turning what had been another highly sexual song into a heart-rending ballad, displaying a hitherto unseen angle on Gaye's work. The Young record somehow seemed symbolic of Marvin's rebirth.

Marvin in turn was delighted by it all. He'd got his sense of humour back, he was optimistic and he was working. Marvin Gaye was rocking again. And then his dad shot him.

Crazy old world, ain't it?

"When I find that a man supersedes intelligence and transcends to wisdom, I'll read his book. I have a healthy disrespect for intellect; I have all the respect in the world for wisdom." *(Feb '81)*

"If my emotions or my feelings say I shouldn't do something because of a very strong principled position that I must take, then in spite of the consequences, in spite of all that is facing me from a detrimental point of view, then I have to remain true to my artistic nature" *(Feb '81)*

"I'm involved in lawsuits because of my unswerving faith in human nature. I never learn. I wish I could stop believing in people. I'm an easy mark. I'm not even sure I've got the best legal counsel in the world." *(Jan '79)*

"I do everything good, but I do music best." *(Oct '76)*

Colin Irwin •

RON GALELLA / GETTY

REM in Chicago, May 26, 1983: (l–r) Michael Stipe, Mike Mills, Peter Buck and Bill Berry

"Bucking for sainthood"

A friendly but mysterious band from the American South arrive in London. Though young, REM already convey a vernacular wisdom, perhaps due to their operating in isolation. "We're not like Bruce Springsteen," says MICHAEL STIPE, "but, yeah, there's a concern for America the place."

— NME APRIL 21 —

"THERE'S TWO SCHOOLS of musician," argues guitarist Peter Buck. "One just digs playing and is in it for fun, the other wants to get rich and famous and thinks it deserves to be seen by the public."

REM, who've been sitting around A&M's London offices for two days talking to people like me, fall into the former camp. Genuinely at their most contented slumming it in redneck bars on the outskirts of dying Midwestern cities, you'd think from the way they talked that the word "art" held no meaning for them.

REM play because they dig that moment on stage when four lifelines cross and fuse and some electric spirit seems to seize them into one flowing motion. They're proud of their records but insist that the group's soul only comes out at night, preferably not in front of 110,000 Police fans (a support slot they rate as "the most wretched and abysmal experience of our lives").

"We're still basically a touring band", says Buck. "That's what we do. The records are an integral part of that, but they're also just one week out of the year when we sound like that. We don't sound like that on stage; we're real fluid, and that's how we should be judged."

The records are still pretty sublime. From the original Hib-Tone 45 of "Radio Free Europe" to the just-released album *Reckoning*, the group have used electric-folk harmonies to weave riveting webs of offbeat pop that mingle elements of The Byrds, The Undertones and The Velvet Underground. The 1982 EP "Chronic Town" was the year's most auspicious debut, five masterworks that ripped along at Undertones pace but with an obsessive introversion – the chorus of "Wolves, Lower" is just the sound of a man melodically bursting into tears. The *Murmur* album (1983) expanded »

PAUL NATKIN / GETTY

the range of moods to instil a yet more coarse and powerful beauty. The superb production of Mitch Easter and Don Dixon was one of interleaving, at once simple and unpredictable, in which a treated snare beat could suddenly thrust out of the sound's centre or a swarm of double-tracked vocals scatter like birds.

The new album is more faithful to its traditions, almost empty of the lumps and jolts of its predecessors. Here a simple harmonic strength stands on its own terms, whether in such yearning blasts as "Second Guessing" and "7 Chinese Brothers", or in the *Loaded* Lou Reed of "Camera", the "We Three" Patti Smith of "Time After Time". Strange sounds still intrude – the bells and wind chimes of "Camera" – but the dominant frame of the record is old-fashioned. This is an album of backwater USA.

"There's less textural overdubbing on this record," says bassist Mike Mills. "*Murmur* was a record with a lot of depth in the sound, whereas this one is more song-oriented – each one has its own sound and its own style."

Advance warning of REM's genial good humour notwithstanding, I hadn't expected quite such unassuming friendliness. What I thought REM might be was a Sunbelt Bunnymen, with a whole burden of inarticulate passions in their hearts. Their music is so simple, so supple, and yet there's a recalcitrance, a mystification, at its core. What are these songs about? What are they doing? Is this group hiding something?

"Hey, I mean, we're just four guys," pleads Buck. "We're marvelling that we've been flown all the way to England and people are lining up to talk to us, and we're gonna talk about ourselves."

How come you're so polite? Aren't you bored stupid by these interviews?

"I am almost never rude to anyone. If I am, it's in a just cause. It's like, where we're from, if people curse one another publicly, then they punch it out, whereas in New York people stand toe-to-toe and scream at each other for five minutes and then walk away. I dunno, maybe it's artificial, but in the South there's a real politeness, just because if you step over that line someone'll take you outside and bash your head in."

Where REM are from is Athens, Georgia, the university town 70 miles north-east of Atlanta, which spawned Pylon and The B-52's and for a year transformed America's independent music scene.

Our four guys still reside in Athens, though they don't do much there besides wait for the next tour. Mike Mills will drop in on Peter Buck, they'll drink beer and watch *The A-Team*. Singer Michael Stipe will sit at home painting, or cupping an ear to Psychic TV records. Drummer Bill Berry I can't account for. I suspect he parties a little harder than the other guys. All four dropped out of the curriculum at the University Of Georgia.

"Being a student gave me some kind of rationale for existing," says Buck. "All the time I was supposed to be in classes just meant I had free time."

Art student Stipe was the only one in any danger of academic success. "Yeah, I was as good as Manet," he shrugs, his face lost in curls and scarves.

Stipe is shy and claims to find interviews hard. Harder still is it to pick up the low, muffled blur of his voice – scarcely a murmur. Sometimes he's miles away, "withdrawn", an ex-problem child. Other times he'll say things that suggest latent psychosis. Apropos of his mystical/mystifying lyrics, for instance, he announces that, "You can't just take a huge pair of scissors and chop the buds off the top of a tree", a symbol greeted with a not inconsiderable amount of mirth from his colleagues.

"That must be right up there with the humanity/sea-cow metaphor," exclaims Buck. "Michael really likes to use metaphors that don't make any sense."

Clearly this sort of humouring is a regular occurrence in the REM household.

Stipe smirks. "I used the sea-cow one for a year and finally some poor jerk in Florida printed it."

How did it go?

"Well, the music business was a giant sea-cow, and all the young new bands were the leeches sucking its blood. The guy printed this hundred-word metaphor. Also, he asked me what music we listened to, and I said The Inkspots, so the rest of the article was about how greatly we had been influenced by The Inkspots."

"Really, you can get bored with interviews," admitted Buck. "Provincial American papers ask you the most boring things, like what is your music about? So you tend to make up things like, 'I dunno, our music is a conscious creating of the myth of modern man against that of the penile mother.'

"OK, so we're making fun of these guys, but we're also making fun of ourselves. This is a pretty silly way to make a living."

ONE THING REM hadn't reckoned with was *Reckoning* being the title of a Grateful Dead album. Peter Buck doesn't wish to be mistaken for a revivalist.

"Comparisons to The Byrds are, as far as I'm concerned, a blot on our career. I liked The Soft Boys a whole bunch more than The Byrds. The only thing I ever liked about psychedelic music was those people doing dumb pop with, like, fake eastern stuff. I really like that absolute garbage trash shit – I laugh all the way through it, but I don't think it has much to do with us."

"The real, real title of the record," explains Stipe, "is *File Under Water*. In America, both titles are on the spine, with nothing on the cover. Here, they insisted on *Reckoning* being on the cover."

File Under Water indicates the futility of attempting to pigeonhole this group. Do they feel far from the madding pop crowd?

Stipe: "Not in the romantic sense of someone, y'know, hangin' out on the edge. I think in a peripheral way we do try to avoid the uglier side of the music business. The whole game of rock is about self-promotion, so you can easily see how someone who didn't have the heart in the first place might become an egomaniac."

Buck: "I don't think anything that's going on in rock'n'roll, in the scene or whatever, has much to do with us – not because we're so unique or special, but just because we never really thought about it much."

"We're just not serious enough about it, basically," suggests lugubrious drummer boy Bill. "Well, I'm not," he adds after a slight silence.

> "I try to move in on one moment and describe what happened"

Mills: "We don't have any mode of dress or anything..."

Stipe: "Hey, not that any of us are bucking for sainthood!"

Buck: "Sounds like the next REM album."

Stipe: "The thing that bothers me about a lot of newer bands is the way they go into the studio with a name producer and come out with this amazingly plush and overproduced sound, which they then try to recreate on stage and that seems to rob them of any spontaneity. I'm not saying that we have more correlation between the records and the shows than anyone else, because I don't think the two sound alike at all, but it seems to me important to start with the live show and then go into the studio, rather than the other way around."

How has this very close, organic style come about?

"I don't know, I think we all have pretty good taste, so no one's gonna violently disagree with anything. When we have arguments, they're always friendly ones, and I think that really affects the music.

"I'm not sure that without a real melodic bass and background vocals and Peter's guitar, I would be a very good vocalist. I think if the band didn't sound the way it does I would probably sing in a different way. The vocal sound came out of there being a necessity for a vocal sound like that."

June 22, 1984: REM perform at the Palladium in Hollywood

"I'd say the same," adds Mills. "I wouldn't be able to play this really melodic-type bass if it wasn't for Peter's guitar. What Peter does, except for a few songs where he strums, is play a constant solo, so rather than have a thumping kind of bass, I'm just as free to work around the melody as he is."

What goes into your lyrics, Michael?

"A lot of things. I watch people a lot. Three-quarters of my lyrics probably come from overheard conversations, though it's getting harder to steal from conversation, because I can't go to parties any more without people wanting to talk about the band.

"It's been pointed out to me that many of the songs are about particular times in the life of the band. It's kind of nice to have a set of words which are so intensely personal that they become universal at the same time. I try to move in on one moment and describe what happened."

Buck: "These songs are like taking a picture of your bedroom. It may not make much sense to anyone else, but to you it's all the things in your life. We're certainly not setting out to be deliberately obscure, but you have to short-circuit the whole idea that literal language is what things are, because literal language is just codes for what happens. Without wanting to sound too arty about it, to bypass actions and go straight to the results is what we're trying to do, to make people feel moved by something without them even being sure of what we're writing about."

Songs like "West Of The Fields" and "Don't Go Back To Rockville" suggest some love for the American heartland.

"I like colloquialism a whole lot, which is one of the advantages of being a touring band. You get to see different pockets of very weird and very interesting things. We're not singing songs like Bruce Springsteen or John Cougar Mellencamp, 'cos they have a tendency to get very smarmy, but yeah, there's a concern for America the place. I'd hope people in Paris and London could get a laugh out of it."

"The thing that bothers me about so much rock'n'roll," says Buck, "is that it's so consciously mythologising. In rock'n'roll, simple things don't seem to happen. There are no stories without definite beginnings and ends."

Stipe: "It's like Patti Smith sang in that song ["Citizen Ship"], *'Gimme your tired, your poor...'*"

Does pop/rock have a social or political meaning any more?

Buck: "I don't think so. The people who listen to The Clash either already agree with The Clash or don't pay any attention to their lyrics at all. I think it's pretty symptomatic that all The Clash's hits have been, y'know, 'Rock the Casbah' and 'Should I Stay Or Should I Go'. I don't think we're gonna get another figure like Dylan who's gonna bring political ideas into a pop format, maybe because there's no one of Dylan's talent around, or just because people don't want it any more.

"Pop music's too fragmented. Maybe in 10 years when it's all wound down and it's just a bunch of boring Fabian types in funny haircuts, someone'll drag it out of the doldrums. There isn't one person who could appeal to all of pop's fans now. Dylan could get away with the Us Against Them thing, because that was the first time it had been brought to America's attention that the world wasn't a perfect place. Now everyone knows that."

Do they feel strongly about anything besides music?

Stipe: "Not really. I think if I wasn't in a band I'd be a monk, or I'd raise monkeys. I just love music and related art forms."

Buck: "It sounds sappy as hell, but the older I get, the more I'd like to do something to make the world a better place. I mean, sometimes I feel vaguely guilty about doing this. I feel I should join the Peace Corps or do volunteer work at the weekends."

Stipe: "We've always kind of said that on the ladder of important things, being in a rock'n'roll band is probably the lowest rung, but then when you think about being Secretary Of State to the United States Of America, it isn't much sillier. And if Peter was Secretary Of State, I wouldn't be here today."

REM are rock's student dreamers – just four guys making some of the loveliest music around. At the forefront of America's underground renaissance, they are busy saving all the most valuable things in their nation's pop tradition. Stipe tells me there are 37 other hard-working bands in Athens, including his sister's acclaimed Oh OK, and more than a few of them will be following in REM's pioneering steps.

What will the band be doing in 10 years?

"We'll be at the forefront of the a cappella craze." *Barney Hoskyns* •

RICHARD E AARON / GETTY

"We've been so insular"

A PR man, a journalist and a sound engineer from Scotland are now THE BLUE NILE. Made in seclusion, their debut is now the subject of intense scrutiny. "All we seem to be doing is running about shaking hands," they confess.

— MELODY MAKER APRIL 28 —

FASHIONED WITH CARE and presented with style. That just about sums up The Blue Nile's music. I could use a lot of florid descriptions – dignified, spacious, emotional, exciting – to try to convey its feeling, but nothing could do it justice. Quite simply, *A Walk Across The Rooftops*, their debut LP, moves the receptive listener more than any music should be allowed to.

The long-suffering *MM* staff will testify (vociferously, I shouldn't wonder) that since the demo tape of the album fell into my hands they've had to suffer my wild enthusing from morn till night! But so completely does this music bewitch the mind, so mesmerising are its intricacies, that it becomes a compulsion. So if I'm turning into a Blue Nile bore I plead guilty, sir, and damn the consequences!

Who are this magic band of men whose spells can capture and entice? How can The Blue Nile have come from literally nowhere and presume to wield such influence over the emotions? What game are they playing and just what are their intentions? An explanation is demanded.

Three characters sit before me on the wicker couch of a bright and airy hotel bar near Virgin's Portobello headquarters. But the trendy bar with its wall-to-wall mirrors and pot plants is clearly not their native habitat. No rock'n'roll warriors these, with their chunky hand-knits and tweeds.

They look out of place in these surroundings, uncomfortable in this situation too – this is their first-ever interview and they're understandably nervous. They've been travelling up and down »

PAUL RIDER

The Blue Nile in 1984: (l-r) Paul Buchanan, Robert Bell and Paul Joseph Moore

Paul Buchanan (right): "I'm just astounded it's taken off"

PAUL RIDER

from their native Glasgow quite a lot recently, and that's not a task that gives them much pleasure either.

"We're not cut out for all this wheeling and dealing; we'd much rather be at home working," says Paul Buchanan, the man behind the amazing voice, a bit abashed at the sudden attention they've attracted. "This whole scenario is very foreign to what we're used to."

If they seem incredulous at their new status it's not surprising. The whole Blue Nile story is one of coincidence and chance. Not that there's anything accidental about their music, but behind its publication lies an interesting tale.

The three met at Glasgow University where Buchanan was studying English Lit, Paul Moore was tackling electronics and fine art (a curious combination!) and Robert Bell was deeply embedded in a mathematics course. After graduating they each moved into a professional career, Moore as a sound engineer for Scottish Television, Bell as a freelance journalist and Buchanan becoming the public relations man for the well-respected 7:84 Theatre Company.

At this stage they were playing together but their music was secondary to their daytime careers. Gradually, though, it became more important, and they released an excellent single called "I Love This Life" initially through a label they set up themselves, Peppermint Records – later to be picked up by the London-based RSO label.

"No one was more surprised than us when RSO expressed an interest," smiles Robert. "Up till then we'd seen what we were doing as being quite a private thing – releasing the single ourselves was just a personal thing; we never expected anything to come of it.

"When RSO picked it up and we started hearing it on the radio it was quite unreal. But that was the turning point; after that we decided to think about writing music in the long term.

"Our connection with RSO was absurd, though," says Paul Buchanan wryly. "It was like a mail-order record company, we never actually met anyone from the label; we used to deal with them over the phone and by post!"

Absurd indeed – but before the situation could be rectified or before the band could reap any benefit from the ripples of attention the single had attracted, RSO went down the plughole, absorbed without trace into the Polydor corporation. "That," grins Robert, "left us somewhat up the creek!"

But undaunted by this ironic turn of fate, they faced the inevitable decisions. They could either continue in their jobs, tackle the music as a part-time interest and hope that another record company would eventually come along, or they could abandon other concerns and concentrate full-time on developing their musical prowess. Paul Buchanan explains, "We had a very definite ideas about the music we wanted to create and we realised that it couldn't be done in half measure, so we quit out jobs and knuckled down to a whole year of concentrated rehearsing and demo-ing.

"We needed to work not only on developing our musicianship skills but we also wanted time to work on the songs. Up till then it had been frustrating – we had ideas but not enough skill to work them through.

"That year of toil was gruelling, none of us had any money, and I mean any money, but it was worth the effort. We could have decided to be more high-profile after the RSO single, to hassle other record companies on the strength of it maybe, but we all knew the time wasn't right."

AFTER THIS INTENSIVE period of work, they reckoned they'd worked on the songs enough to warrant going into Castlesound Studios, near Edinburgh, to demo an album. This is where fate, which had played tricks on them before, stepped in again – this time with more encouraging results. Linn Products, a Scottish company renowned for its high-quality hi-fi systems (no relation, incidentally, to the reviled LinnDrum) were opening a record-cutting plant and asked Castlesound for some tapes to practise cutting on. In the pile was the Blue Nile demo.

"They contacted us out of the blue and asked us if we'd consider signing to their label," says Paul Moore with an incredulous shrug of the shoulders. "They had only ever released specialist-interest stuff up to then, folk and classical mainly.

"But they were so enthusiastic about our work and apparently so excited by it that we decided to go with them. They're real quality buffs; they concentrate on improving the quality of the sound and that appealed to us as well. Also they weren't an overtly commercial label, and we knew we'd not be hassled into deadlines and marketing pitches and all that stuff."

So with Linn bravely backing the enterprise, The Blue Nile (a name that Robert jokingly describes as "a desperate attempt to associate with the exotic") returned to Castlesound to make the album. The unhurried approach was again vitally important.

"We wanted to walk before we could gallop," Robert explains. "We didn't want to do the usual kind of first album. You know – one or two half-decent songs and the rest padding. We wanted to take it slowly and have a result worth listening to."

In fact it took five months to record, six months to release after completion, and with the band having spent a whole year rehearsing the songs, it's taken almost two years to surface. The result, thought, is magnificent. Steve Lillywhite heard it when working at Castlesound with Big Country, and described it as the best debut album of the past five years.

> "It had been frustrating – we had ideas but not enough skills"

The songs, written by Bell and Buchanan, have a grandeur magnified by intricate arrangements and an eloquence carried by Paul's distinctly personal vocal style. From the sweeping passion of "Tinseltown In The Rain" to the haunting elegance of "Easter Parade", the album catches you off guard, its unashamed emotional exploration a comforting feast for the battered senses.

The diligence of its production is evident in every note – even its silences carry import.

Between them the three play guitar, bass, keyboards and an assortment of percussion instruments. But, as they explain, "we don't have set musical roles. The whole idea is to be as versatile as we can."

On the record they're joined by Nigel Thomas (of The London Philharmonic Orchestra) on drums, a string section, and Calum Malcolm, who engineered the album, on occasional keyboards.

"Everyone got very involved in the record," Buchanan says. "Like with Nigel it wasn't a conventional session situation where he would just play what he was told. He got involved in the songs and in the ideas – which was obviously better for us both."

So with all this toil finally behind them, are they pleased with the reaction to the album? Virgin, through whom Linn have signed a distribution deal, are really getting their knickers in a twist over it. They've just been given a golden goose and they know it.

"I suppose we are pleased," says Paul, a little reluctantly perhaps. "The problem is that we hardly know where we are any more. I mean we've been so insular for the past two years, so single-minded in what we were doing, and now suddenly all we seem to be doing is running about shaking hands."

"When we were doing the album we honestly weren't thinking about what the reaction to it might be," adds Paul Moore. "We just couldn't think that far ahead. We were a lot more worried about when we might get some sleep than about record contracts and publishing deals and all that."

But reluctant as they may be to enter the circus, The Blue Nile can't give us such an enticing masterpiece and then run away. Such powerful songs demand some explanation.

"I'm just astounded it's taken off," says Buchanan. "If it goes on for another year I'll be surprised," he adds with disarming honesty. "I mean, we were all thinking of going back to our jobs once the LP was finished. We really don't have grand plans for The Blue Nile. I'm frightened by the implications of what's happening.

"I don't want to have to define things, to make it seem as if we're constructing a philosophy to go with a 'career'. We honestly just want to make the kind of music we like, in our own environment, in our own time. We're not competitive or overambitious, and we don't want that to change."

"We're just making the kind of records we want to hear," Robert affirms, gently but firmly for the benefit of anyone who might have designs on the band's potential. "We want to take our time and have a good time doing it, that's all."

DRAWING FROM PERSONAL expression rather than calculated design is important to this trio of gentle, stubborn, idealistic men. Their lyrics are tinged with sadness, romanticism, elation and a perception of the passions of love that makes other love songs pathetic in comparison.

With the rapid pop beat of the single, "Stay", the enveloping warmth of "Tinseltown", the sparse balladry of "Easter Parade" and the inventive shapes of "Heatwave", "From Rags To Riches" and "Automobile Noise", they explore the form of sound and its emotional effect. There's no thought for personal gain beyond the satisfaction of a job well done. Buchanan's voice is a hypnotic that I defy you to resist. Yet it's going to be a frustratingly long time before we see The Blue Nile playing – if ever. "We'll probably do another album before we even think of doing live work," explains Robert. They're aware that this step is unusual but are clearly determined to follow their own instincts. "We've never played live – oh, we messed about a bit to finance the first single..." He won't really clarify except to say it was "a bit offbeat".

"The thing is that we're not known at all, not even in Scotland," says Paul. "We were wrapped up in our own work when the whole Scottish 'scene' was erupting. No one's ever heard of us and now that we've finished this album, come out of our cocoon for a while, we're quite eager to get back to what we consider is normal."

It's obvious that The Blue Nile aren't about to subject themselves to the pressures that a successful record could bring. It's not even certain that their splendid records will be successful, though surely only blind ignorance could ignore such delicious music. They themselves don't seem to mind either way – they've done their part knowing that they'll reach the people who matter. That in itself is a rare and wonderful thing. *Helen Fitzgerald* •

ALBUMS REVIEW 1984

Heart-stopping open spaces

MM MAY 5 The Blue Nile's debut provides expansive mood music.

The Blue Nile A Walk Across The Rooftops LINN

Good music can always complement the mood you're in, but you know you're onto something really special when songs can create and influence these moods of their own volition. The Blue Nile's stunning debut album seduces the emotions as well as the senses, and instead of fighting its effect, the sensible thing to do is relax and enjoy it.

Seduced initially by the intoxicating width of the title track, with its heart-stopping open spaces and sensuous basslines, you'll recognise straight off that you've hit on a vein of hedonistic luxury. There's a mesmeric quality in this music that makes you want to savour every track with the respectful appreciation of a connoisseur. Like a good book you don't want it to end, but when it does that thrilling potency loses nothing in reputation.

The tracks weave patterns that leave traces of spectacular emotions

"Tinseltown In The Rain" stands out as the sweetest flavour, lush strings and a dynamic beat forming a backdrop for the incisive clarity of Paul Buchanan's vocals. Lesser mortals have compared his mellow tones to Tom Waits, John Cale (on "Easter Parade") and even Nils Lofgren, but that's all preposterous nonsense.

Rich and smooth, his tones have no sharp edges, no unpleasant gravel. His style is distinctive and these way-out comparisons are clutching at straws.

The seven tracks here are diverse but never gratingly extreme. There are some concessions to commercial suss – the single "Stay" is cleverly attuned to pop sensibility but still retains a dignity that is the backbone of these remarkable songs.

Experimenting with texture is obviously a Blue Nile fascination, from the sparse piano/vocal simplicity of the ballad "Easter Parade" to the more complex constructions of "Heatwave" and "Tinseltown". The authors are bent on moody intricacy without being artificially clever.

Individually, the tracks weave patterns that leave traces of spectacular emotions. Nostalgia, romance, elation and reflection are woven into their fabric with gossamer-fine delicacy.

Their spacious arrangements are deceptively fluid. Listen to "From Rags To Riches" and "Automobile Noise" (the instrumental version, "Saddle The Horses", is the single's B-side) on headphones and you'll see that their simplicity is a carefully crafted illusion.

A Walk Across The Rooftops generates a rarefied atmosphere that's a comfort to the soul. If this is just a sampler of The Blue Nile's catalogue, then we're in store for a whole new chapter in delight. *Helen Fitzgerald*

Heaven Up Here, it said everything Mac didn't like about the Bunnymen but didn't remedy it, never making that crucial transition into what he thought the group should be.

It was a valuable exorcism and a good record for that, but if *Porcupine* was Mac in a chrysalis, turning down roles in a fit of introversion – "Look what's happened! Why?" – then *Ocean Rain* is the re-flowering, a butterfly born of optimism, of talents rediscovered. It says, "Look! This is what can happen."

In effect, *Ocean Rain* means that Mac doesn't play songs to people any more. He now plays with songs that play with people. He can alter the emphasis, impact, even import of the new songs at will. It's as if they were created specifically to be performed, written with a strong awareness of their protagonist.

"It's the difference between drama and melodrama," he decides. "This album is dramatic without getting into the melodramatic ways that I suppose we've been prone to in the past – although not willingly."

THE SONGS ON *Ocean Rain* can come alive with each unique interpretation, whereas, he admits, Bunnymen favourites such as "Over the Wall" and "Rescue" were one-dimensional and played easily "blindfold". Deciding this was initially a simple matter of mechanics, but when it was rectified, it led to a cathartic discovery. The Bunnymen were playing too loud for Mac, too intensely in block chords instead of chord progressions, in the wrong structures, in the wrong key.

He wasn't singing, he was straining, and how could he blame folks like me for missing out on his humour when the whole aura of the songs was overwhelmingly, if unintentionally, self-important?

Porcupine sweated the rock-messiah role out of Mac's system and then the four Bunnymen took a long, hard look at themselves and decided to ease up. Allowing more space allowed more character. Will got into the Violent Femmes, Pete took to brushes, Les went a bit hazy and Mac found he was no longer Mr Emotional. He had, in fact, arrived at a place he calls "No Attitude".

This "No Attitude" situation evolved instinctively but, for want of anything better, he purloined the title and much of the articulation of its philosophy from my review of last winter's Bunny shows in Stratford-Upon-Avon. He's been expanding and expounding it ever since.

The notion, quite simply, is this: if the performer completely relinquishes all preconceptions about how the song should be delivered to the passing whims, desires and necessities of the moment, the audience can't take anything for granted and, in being forced to question every nuance and gesture, we partake of a stimulating game of interpretation capable of changing moment to moment, night to night. In a situation pregnant with such uncertainty, anything could be ironic, a sense of mystery prevails and inanity assumes the power of enigma.

"A band like us without a sense of mystery is nothing," Mac proclaims.

"Lyrically, it works like this: I have a vision of lyrical beauty and I don't think I need to say anything that can necessarily mean anything big. I don't think I'm particularly clever – Elvis Costello and Roddy Frame are clever and I think they destroy the beauty by working with words from an idea of what they're supposed to do.

"I mean, in normal conversation somebody can say something that, say, shocks you but isn't premeditated – that's the only way I can write. I place more importance on natural intelligence than cleverness, because I think cleverness just leads you up some stupid alley.

"I get a lot of criticism for writing in that way, but it's like criticising an impressionist painter for painting impressionistically. I think it's a fairly weird criticism – you can only criticise something on the level that it's at, and if it's bad in that way, then it's bad.

"We've always written the same way; it's just that the spectrum of how we write is that much bigger now. Shakespeare wrote in the same way as me. He wrote comedy and tragedy but the tragedy always had comedy and the comedy had tragedy."

This isn't as daft as it sounds. What Mac is saying is that art can touch on truth. Just as the Bard delighted in confounding convention, so does Mac. In *Hamlet* (a role Mac often readily assumes), the prince won't accept his part in the old scheme of the revenge tragedy and spends most of the play moaning about having to avenge his father's murder. His actions (or inactions) don't make the play true, but they do the next best thing, creating a live friction with the mechanical conventions and revealing them as false. Mac does the same in pop. He won't preach and won't take any responsibility for our interpretation of his songs.

As he sings in "My Kingdom", one of the more casually jocular songs on *Ocean Rain*: *"You suck the foot that kicks you / And you kiss the hand that hits you."*

PHIL DENT / GETTY

Four on the floor (l-r): Pete de Freitas, Will Sergeant, Les Pattinson and Ian McCulloch

I take that to mean he won't play the fame game by anyone else's rules. He's not letting on, obviously, but he doesn't deny it.

"First of all and finally, there's no way you can recreate true life, and nobody wants that in a song because it would be boring. Great songs have always got to have some other interpretation to them – not necessarily different, but your own."

AT STRATFORD, MAC delivered the lines of "Thorn Of Crowns" with as much passion ("Oh, more, I think") as he did "Rescue", one of his more famous emotional numbers. They went: "*C-c-c cucumber/C-c-c cabbage/C-c-c-c-cauliflower.*" What was the audience to make of this? Was Mac taking the piss out of passion or what?

"It's really easy without all that weight of meaning that gets attached to it and that you attach to yourself," he laughs. "I sit there sometimes thinking, 'God, this has got to be about...' and it can never be about... it can never be about anything as big as the biggest thing in the world, but if you write '*C-c-c-c-cucumber*', it could be open to all interpretations which, added together, can be as big as that."

> "I wanna try and reduce the distance between acting and reality"

And once the seeds of doubt are sown, the old songs too, so set in their ways, so set in our minds, are ripe for reconstruction. It's a role he relishes. It's acting.

"I find myself in a weird position now that, of all the pop personalities, I'm the one that discerning people seem to either make more of or less of. I mean, it can be enviable and unenviable, but I do realise the importance of my position... I think...

"Like a lot of our fans are Big Country and U2 fans as well, and I can't understand why, because to me they're just whatever anthems they choose to write about. They associate themselves with anthems they choose to write about. They associate themselves with anthems, but I don't suit that role and I don't think Stuart Adamson does either. Y'know, he's not exactly a Bob Dylan 'Don't Follow Leaders' type, and yet all these people are needing to attach themselves to this anthemic gibberish that doesn't mean anything. I don't think you can be that sincere about anthems that are about stock attitudes."

"A Promise" was anthemic. "Yeah, but it's a lot more fragile than 'In A Big Country'. To me, 'A Promise' was true, it wasn't a slogan. There's the difference. With U2 and Big Country there's a need to collect the mass. 'In A Big Country' isn't Stuart Adamson, it's him on behalf of a mass, but 'A Promise' was about me, and if it could be interpreted by other people as relating to them, then that as well.

"I'd rather not slag off bands, but I wish they'd slag themselves off a bit. I mean, we reassess ourselves constantly, but to me all these other bands are just looking how to recapture that great moment they had. We've never tried to do that. With this album, I think, all I've tried to do is recapture how to write songs."

REALISING THAT PART of the art of great performance is self-consciousness – being seen and heard to analyse the performance in motion – Mac sent reverberations around that hall in Stratford that, frankly, had many Bunny-fans flummoxed.

"It's good that I'm interpreted in a lot of ways. I mean, Bono is Bono, but I don't want to be 'Mac' McCulloch. I'm Steve McCulloch – that's important. The fact is that I have a particular voice that's more credible than Bono's or Stuart Adamson's, because if I sing out of tune – which I have been known to – it doesn't matter.

"Dave McCullough [ex-*Sounds*], when he reviewed *Crocodiles* when it first came out, said, 'Ian McCulloch's got the voice of the '80s and the unfortunate thing is that he knows it.'

"Well, I have. I have the kind of voice that lends itself to being dramatic and, on this album, I've wanted to expose me as a voice more than on any other album. On all the other albums, I'd sing with the reverb on and bland it out a bit, but on this it sounds like not the greatest singer in the world but *the* voice, and I think that's more important."

Such blatant exposure suggests Mac's learned to cope with and express embarrassment of performance.

"Yeah, you've got to... especially if you can walk around with bad eyesight all your life." Mac's myopic, unfocused stare apparently unnerves people. "People think, 'God, what are you on tonight, Mac?' People used to say that when I was 13 at school – 'You on drugs?' I didn't know what drugs were! Bad eyesight – it's OK!

"No, it's a pity really, because I don't want any false charisma attached to me; I don't want it by default. I think I've enough natural charisma without that."

What? Like that praying mantis dance?

"Oh, that's just how I dance. I freak out a bit and a lot of people say, 'Hey, your dancing's great', but it's not dancing to me, it's just articulating bodily what I would have done vocally. You can dance to anything if you develop your own thing."

It's as much a crowd-teaser as a crowd-pleaser.

"Yeah, that's fairly deliberate. You have to destroy and confirm at the same time. You can't be trapped with a stereotype. John Hurt on *Film Night* said there's two variations of character actor – there's the type that takes the part to him and the type that goes to the part.

He described himself as one who goes to the part and I think that's what I am. It's the only way to retain yourself. Bono and Stuart Adamson let the part go to them.

"It's like something Lorraine said the other night. I was talking about some particular singer and I said, 'Oh, he sounds just like he's pretending', and she said, 'Well, that's what singing's about, isn't it?' And it's true, but you've got to balance it out between pretence and honesty.

"One of the things I worry about is that the great modern pop songs are all actually acts. Like 'She Loves You' – you can't actually say that John Lennon's singing about himself. That's a worry to me because, in that respect, maybe 'Karma Chameleon' is up there alongside it when, from where I listen, it's just a pile of crap like Olivia Newton-John or someone.

"I try and change the rules of that standard 'great pop song' into being able to be really emotional; I wanna try and reduce the distance between acting and reality as much as possible and still create that great pop-ness, but so far the gap's quite big between, say, what Jim Morrison really felt and his public persona. Lou Reed was a lot closer."

This attitude worries me. It sounds as if Mac's losing patience, outgrowing the perimeter of pop's capability. It can't contain his irony because that's neither what it's about nor even what it wants to be about.

"I agree totally, but what can I do? Lyrically I'm fighting a losing battle. It's the same as rape being on the increase and crime and lack of brain power. That may sound pompous, like something the school swot would say, but it's true.

"The attitude today is you've got to be average, that's the noble thing, and it's the most disgusting attitude that prevails throughout the world. There's just so much scum throughout every class in every country, and I'm accused of being right-wing and pompous and self-opinionated because I think that certain things matter."

***OCEAN RAIN* IS** Mac's insistence that pop should matter, that it shouldn't give in to easy options, that it should do what it damn well likes. It was, inevitably, self-produced.

"It had to be, otherwise it would have been like Shakespeare giving his plays to an editor saying, 'Ponce 'em up a bit and make 'em commercial.' That doesn't work for me. If what you want is to be big in America, then Steve Lillywhite or somebody of that ilk is obviously the person, but that's just an excuse for being second-rate.

"I mean, when Bowie went Ziggy, it was annoying. Old-age pensioners didn't like David Bowie, but Boy George is the OAP's favourite – that says a lot for the death of pop and yet he's being hailed as the new pop brigade! I know when people interview me they're expecting me to come up with some little controversial thing now and again. Well, I just wish there were a few more potent people."

I tell him that, of the hundreds of interviews I've ever done, only about half a dozen people had anything to say.

He shoots me that wicked smirk: "Who are the other five?"

Steve Sutherland •

June 17, 1984: Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds appear at Exit, "Chicago's original punk bar since 1981"

'A tight, tense drama"

NICK CAVE discusses his recent activity, in particular his appetite for provocation. "My particular songs are fairly harmless vehicles for expressing what I might entertain within my mind," he says.

— NME MAY 12 —

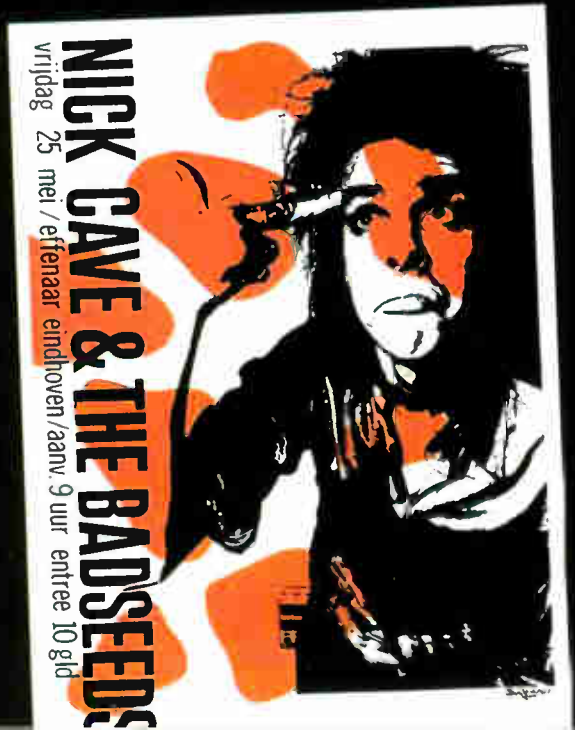
WITH A PRESENCE as powerful as The Birthday Party, it's often tempting to assign them their own fictional personality. I always thought of them as Werner Herzog's most notable saintly idiot, Kaspar Hauser, who, raised in a dark cellar, developed a way of seeing and thinking that was most disparate, more alive than those around him in the outside world.

But then, Nick Cave has been even less complimentary about them himself.

For his persona in The Birthday Party, he began with the image of the consumptive hag from the grotesque birthday party sequence in Dostoevsky's *Crime And Punishment*, sitting in the corner coughing into a handkerchief and displaying the spots to the assembled company. He was a sordid exhibitionist, an attention-seeker.

By the later days of the band, his image had metamorphosed into a slug, whose art was its slime and whose movements were slow and painful.

Slithering between irony and tragedy, last year The Birthday Party slug finally sliced itself open on that razor's edge, but instead of the unsightly mess you might have expected, it left behind the finest examples of its art in "The Bad Seed" and "Mutiny" – two four-track EPs that shone through the amorphous mass of transparent mediocrity released in 1983. »



PAUL NATKIN / GETTY

With both records, there's a feeling of something intangible, of a band reaching where they ought not to go – they provoke imagination and inspire hyperbole. Both are testaments of romantic daring and sick obsessiveness, full of feverish images of guilt, pictures of murder that are simultaneously horrendous and secretly attractive.

It was at that point that it first became clear that Nick's songwriting was departing from every mode known to rock music and developing into some new, iridescent form, in turns trenchant and direct, epic and overblown. Meanwhile, the band's music was hurling itself into a state of wild, epileptic disorder that seemed to be driven by a state of frenzy, even in its most dangerously restrained moments.

With The Birthday Party literally falling apart – Rowland S Howard had already gone and Blixa Bargeld from Einstürzende Neubauten was deputising on guitar – they made their glorious exit on "Mutiny!", smashing themselves spectacularly against their own reflections. And yet in the midst of the crash, Nick captured the mood of modern Britain with an acute perception that the desperate, depressing worthiness of a Weller could never have approached.

"*At night my body blushed to the whistle of the birch,*" he raved. "*With a little practise I learned to use it on myself.*"

With that line, ostensibly referring to religion, he encapsulated the masochism of a nation that seems to be yielding any notion of individual power to a higher authority. It was a stinging condemnation of a system controlled by punishment and reward – both determined from above.

It was a rigorous statement of the individual's revolt against the utopia as an opium of the people, a reaction against any dulling agent of the imagination. It ended The Birthday Party in the only way possible – violently.

From the wreckage of "Mutiny!", Cave has now emerged with a solo LP, *From Her To Eternity*. Recorded with the quiet and underestimated drumming force of The Birthday Party's Mick Harvey, Blixa Bargeld crushes an unearthly sound from a guitar held together with nails, Hugo Race (previously of Melbourne band Plays With Marionettes) a rhythm guitar background and Barry Adamson's bass holds an axis solid enough to link the straining elements together. Released from all controls, Cave's songwriting has spiralled into a wild and wheeling poetry of cruelty, pursuing the most nightmarish strands of The Birthday Party's fascinations.

It begins with an assault on the forbidden territory of Leonard Cohen's "Avalanche", with Nick at his most supremely arrogant. In Cohen's words, he discovers an attitude that's remarkably close to his own philosophy of ugliness as a platform for individuality. "*I am on a pedestal,*" comes the grinding vocal, "*You did not place me there/ Your laws do not compel me now to kneel grotesque and bare.*" In such a setting it comes as a statement of messianic self-justification.

In stark contrast, "Cabin Fever" is a vivid evocation of chaos with Cave playing Charles Laughton's Captain Bligh on a metaphorical Ship Of Fools, set on a blind course for disaster. "Well Of Misery" plumbs the depths of personal irresponsibility, with the narrator using his own dissatisfaction as the means to murder the one-time lover he sees as its cause. Its vengefulness runs against another contrast in the self-directed anguish of "From Her To Eternity".

The second side, originally intended to comprise the second part of a double EP package, further pursues Nick's fascination with the American Deep South, in the story of "Saint Huck", the corrupted innocent who "*trades in the old man of the river/ For the dirty old man of the latrine*". "Wings Off Flies" is the nearest the LP comes to light relief, a bizarre little joke that has the lead character playing the old game of she-loves-me, she-loves-me-not, using insect wings instead of flower petals. Inevitably, in the lack of an insect with an odd number of wings, she loves him not. Finally, "Box For Black Paul" begins as a Who Killed Cock Robin-style elegy for the destruction of The Birthday Party, and develops into a huge and bloated dirge that aches with a yearning beauty, the voice dredging the loss to produce the loneliest sound you've ever heard.

Of course it's not constructed without a certain humour, but even by the standards of The Birthday Party, it's a dark variety indeed – there's not a lot to laugh about. It's a work more contemplative than Marc Almond's *Torment And Toreros*, but one that shares its total ambition. *From Her To Eternity* is a statement of romantic irrationalism, stretching to the very limits.

> "My songs require you to listen to and understand each line"

TALK TO NICK Cave and you're talking to a variety of characters. Like JG Ballard, he views external reality as a sinister novel, and he seeks to play more parts: the irresponsible artist, the wounded romantic, the hunched grotesque, the Nietzschean individualist. He plays with the cartoon personae of Nick Cave in the same manner that he manipulates the images of Elvis Presley or Iggy Pop.

Right now he's playing a character very close to the hag displaying her blood spots, as he indicates the cramped surroundings of his current living conditions. Look at my squalor!

"Nice, isn't it?" he asks with ironic relish as we enter the single room he shares with Blixa and Hugo. At the moment, though, Blixa has fled to Berlin and Hugo to Oxford, leaving Nick to share the room with a handful of telephone messages, a copy of *Moby Dick* and a treasured portrait of GI period Elvis Presley.

Staring from the wall, Elvis stands legs astride, facing forward with a grin, framed by yellow, peeling Sellotape. Nick stands framed by the yellow, peeling paint of the door that connects to the tiny bathroom, long skinny legs astride, the toes of his pointed boots leaving the floor to curl back, pixie-fashion. The back of his black satin jacket is turned to reveal "Korea" embroidered on it in large, lurid letters.

He runs nicotine-stained fingers through the backcombed nest of hair, an amused glance reflected in the bathroom mirror as he watches the latest voyeurs stumbling around in search of standing space amidst the dirty laundry, sniffing the stale sweat of the artist's atmosphere.

"I always think it's important to show people where you live," he continues.

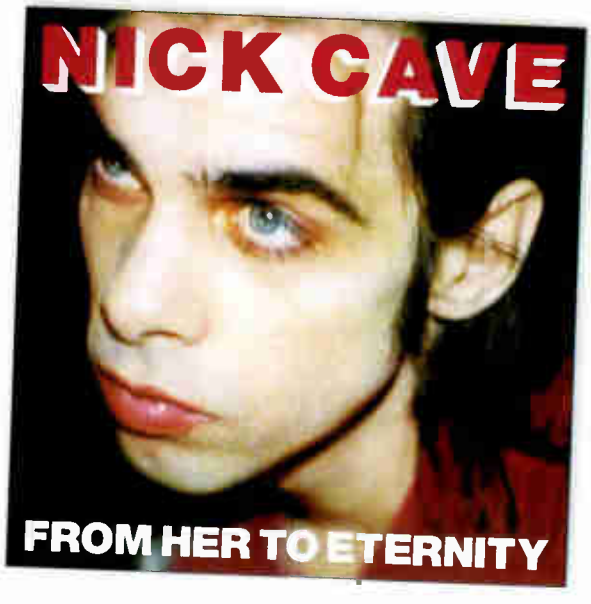
What was that line from the Elvis Costello song? "*This proposition for invasion of your privacy/ Give yourself away and find the take in me.*" So what are the chances that Nick Cave will give himself away? Show us the bleeding heart he delights in setting against the swastika?

Well, first we'd have to perform the impossible task of distinguishing just which one of the many faces on show, both here and elsewhere, precisely is Nick Cave. What Cave's critics have often missed is that his art is one of dramatic fakery, executed with a wicked delight in defying expectation.

Of course there's the usual Wild Man Of Rock/ Thinking Man Of The Modern Age dichotomy between the most readily recognisable Nick Cave stage persona and the calm and contemplative demeanour of Nick Cave the interviewee. But his gallery of masks contains less easily classifiable characters than that – some borrowed from history, some from classical fiction, or from the most hallowed museums of rock'n'roll.

In his songs, fiction merges into reality, the shadow of Raskolnikov mingles with Hamlet; Cave's own creations – Gun, King Ink, The Dim Locator – mix with hybrids like Saint Huck. All of them are partly, but never entirely, Cave himself. His latest fascination stares at us from the wall.

"I've just joined the Elvis Presley Fan Club," he grins. "They're sending me some more posters; can't imagine I'll go to many of the meetings, though."



The Presley infatuation is reflected in a vocal inflection at the end of "Box For Black Paul". More specifically there's the next single, a version of "In The Ghetto" honed down to tones of semi-seriousness from the original scoured version that appeared in his contribution to The Immaculate Consumptives shows.

"There's very little in it to suggest that it's recorded with anything other than the greatest respect and admiration," he says with a certain bemusement. "I love it because it's a song I've lived with for the last six months – but I can imagine a Birthday Party fan might have some difficulty knowing what to make of it."

As with most of Cave's fascinations, his interest in Presley is not in his greatness but in his decline, in the artifice rather than the art.

"The influence that I get from any fictional character," he says, "is from their cartoon selves, the point at which they themselves become cliches. In that sense, all of my own characters are cartoons of themselves as well, in that they begin with a stock cliche that people can latch onto, that will trigger off the desired initial impression."

I remember being derided for comparing Mark E Smith's songwriting to a Buster Keaton sketch, but I still maintain that both Smith and Nick, who belong to a mutual admiration society, take the same surrealistic delight in building up expectations to shatter them. But would he say that his artistic progress has been a matter of avoiding becoming a cliche himself?

"No, I would say that if anything I have done my best to embrace being a cliche myself," he argues. "The way that I write and the way that I am as a person is involved in the use of a cliche in an environment where it would not usually be found, such that the new setting restores it to its original potency. You have to remember what a cliche is – which is something that was formerly powerful, but through overuse has become meaningless. You can restore its meaning by putting it in a different setting."

Musically, *From Her To Eternity* is a sparse sound, snagged with Blixa Bargeld's corruption of the blues guitar. As a long-standing friend of Nick's, Blixa was the natural choice, not only because Neubauten's philosophy is in accord with Cave's "search for a simpler, more directly violent" form of expression, but because as a non-musician he – like Kaspar Hauser – is incapable of seeing things in a conventional manner.

"As far as I can work out, Blixa can't actually play the guitar in the conventional form at all, but he has some method of tuning the instrument that can produce the most amazing noises without the use of any effects whatsoever. He would regard using foot pedals or whatever as a hopelessly middle-class, public-school form of playing."

Where the music is simple and direct, though, the lyrics have developed to a new form of complexity. The images are direct and violent, but there's always something deeper and darker than the surface indicates. It makes a demand on the listener that Nick describes with a typical arrogance.

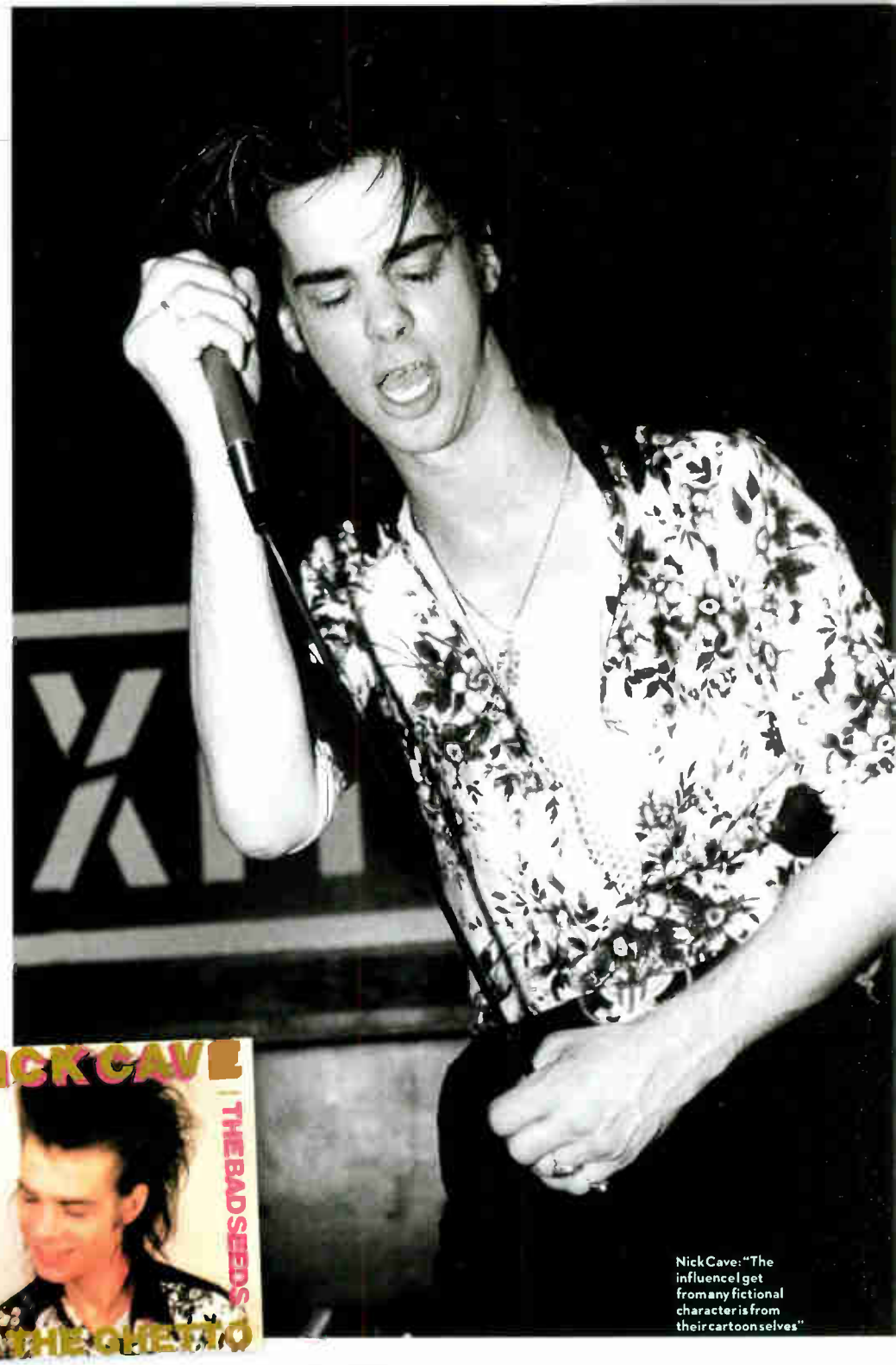
"I see it in same the way as a tight, tense drama in the cinema – my songs require you to listen to the storyline from beginning to end, to listen to and understand each line. Otherwise you get lost in the same way as you would if you decided to visit the toilet in the final scenes of *Taxi Driver* and expect to know what the film is about."

> "The way I am is not due to the influence of my parents"

As he proclaims, he has abandoned any careerist notions that he might at one time have entertained. It's a brave attempt to escape the tyrannies of commercial punishment and reward, which has its roots in his philosophy of the individual.

"I would like to escape defining my own reality in terms of punishment and reward, in preference to what I consider to be good and bad. Those lines in 'Mutiny', referring to punishment and reward, were intended to point the finger at religion, and why people believed in the conventional concepts of good and bad, which are based on greed and fear.

"I'm very interested in discovering something within myself that is not affected by other forces. I have very strong feelings that the way I am is not due to the influence of my parents or the environment that I was brought up in – any external factors are basically quite superficial. I would like to consider myself totally alone and above those influences, which is to »



Nick Cave: "The influence I get from any fictional character is from their cartoon selves"

PAUL NATKIN / GETTY

do with developing a character that is sufficiently strong not to be influenced by the way that other people think, but to develop a moral code that is not under the influence of ordinary laws and religious laws and be able to live under that without a nagging conscience.

"I have ways of thinking philosophically that are not always so easy to put into practice; the main one being that the laws that are made up to govern everybody shouldn't apply to me. They shouldn't apply to anybody, but not everybody has the belief in themselves to realise that they are different."

It's a manner of thinking that will be familiar to anyone who has read Dostoevsky's *Crime And Punishment*. Raskolnikov, the character whose face Cave is assuming here, is under the belief that there are moral absolutes of good and evil that transcend the law. To be truly great, he reasons, a person should be capable of committing murder in the cause of good – like Napoleon. In the end Raskolnikov is strangled by the very "nagging conscience" that Cave refers to.

Murder, of course, looms large in Cave's scheme of things: in "Well Of Misery" and "Black Paul" and back to "She's Hit", "Gold Blade", or most strikingly in "Sonny's Burning", where a guilty aesthetic is drawn from the comparison of a burning body to *"a bright erotic star"*.

"My particular songs are fairly harmless vehicles for expressing what I might entertain within my mind," he argues, assuming the role of irresponsible artist, "or might find it desirable or interesting to do, were it not for the obviously impractical lengths you would have to go to to commit these things. The things that I write about are things that, outside of the obvious difficulties, I would like to witness.

"I wouldn't write about these things if I didn't feel some attraction towards them. I don't dwell on these themes in order to be controversial. There are things that I do for those reasons, but they're very deliberate and obvious things that are making a comment on the idea of being controversial, and how ridiculous and shallow such a way of life is."

You mean the vacuity of the good old-fashioned shock value?

"Well... for putting this age-old bone of contention the swastika, using this as a symbol and associating yourself with it, never have I considered what the inference of having this particular symbol is; rather it has always constituted part of my sense of humour as regards what is controversial and what isn't. It's still tempting for me to use that particular device.

"In the case of the swastika, I've always used it in the most deliberately moronic fashion. I'll also do that in the writing, by inserting a line that is deliberately shocking or irresponsible. It's finding those symbols and thoughts that are far more shocking in certain environments than they are in others. As I've said, certain cliches in the right context can still be reasonably effective. The swastika, as I've used it, is effective – I've also used it in contexts that certain people that I find totally intolerable will be repulsed by."

Nick's irresponsibility takes him to the edges of thoughts that may be buried in the most self-consciously moral of minds. It may also be argued that it takes him to the edge of what might be conventionally defined as sanity.

"I think that might be a fairly extreme way of saying something that might be true, but – for want of a better word – it's a controversial way of saying it...

"I find it hard to talk about things like this because I'm aware of the way that I would previously have thought of them. I'm very conscious of my thought developing in directions that I would previously have thought of as funny, something to toy around with."

> "Certain cliches in the right context can still be effective"

What do you mean specifically by that?

"Well... it's difficult to talk about it specifically, but... when I wrote 'Deep In The Woods', which I consider a fairly pompous and overblown song, I was dealing with a subject that I felt uncomfortable about dealing with and I was nervous about showing that to the group. I felt they would think it was too unreasonable, or too over the top, to produce an ode to a murdered woman, a severely murdered woman. Now I find it hard not to write about things like that, because the imagery excites me in a way that the images of religion excited me.

"Even in that sense, I had never thought of tossing over in my mind the worth of religion, I always assumed that it was a blind alley and not worth thinking about, although I plundered it for its imagery. These days I find myself more and more considering it as a viable alternative. If I thought anything was heading towards insanity it would have been to start feeling religious about things."

So you now find the belief in God a reasonable alternative?

"Well, I can say now, quite firmly, that I do believe in God. Not that I believe in the Bible or Christianity, but a more convenient word to express something that predestines what we are to be when we are born, some force that made me different from other people, in terms of what we are talking about, about the individual; some core inside myself, impenetrable to anyone else and unable to be affected by anybody else. I'm not talking about an old man with a beard, or about retribution, that after this life something will happen to me, that I'm really going to go to heaven if I'm a good boy or hell if I'm bad. It's just some force that may as well be called God as anything else.

"Is that a scoop?"

Is it intended to be?

"No, not at all, it's not a swastika."

AS THE CONVERSATION continues in a local pub, an old man leans across to our table, and fixes Nick with a stare. "You're an arrogant fellow," he accuses.

"I've got a right to be, I'm a famous person," Nick replies, "I've just done a European tour."

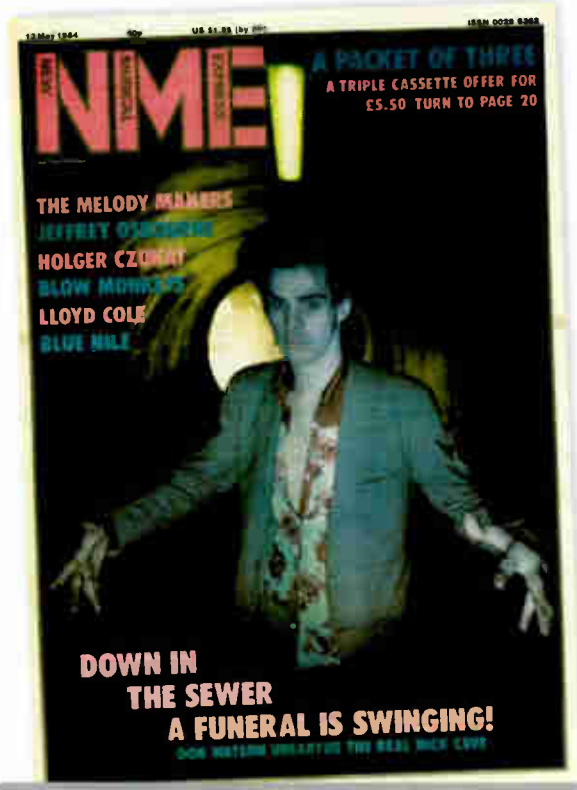
"Oh yeah, what's your name?"

"I'm Napoleon," answers Nick, with a twinkle.

Yes, the role of the irresponsible artist as provocateur, as enemy of the tidy world of liberal moralists, has been in existence for some time now, long enough now to qualify for cliche status.

All the same, some of us are grateful that the rich tapestry of rock'n'roll has been splattered with the pus and gore of The Velvet Undergrounds, the Iggy Pops, the Foetuses, the Marc Almonds and the Nick Caves, figures who will play with fire and seek to scorch the glossy package of the shiny pop fantasy.

Nick Cave is an ardent irrationalist, too complex a creature to plod the straight line of the liberal path. His images – in conversation as in his songwriting – are a perpetual provocation contrived to throw even his admirers into a state of crisis.

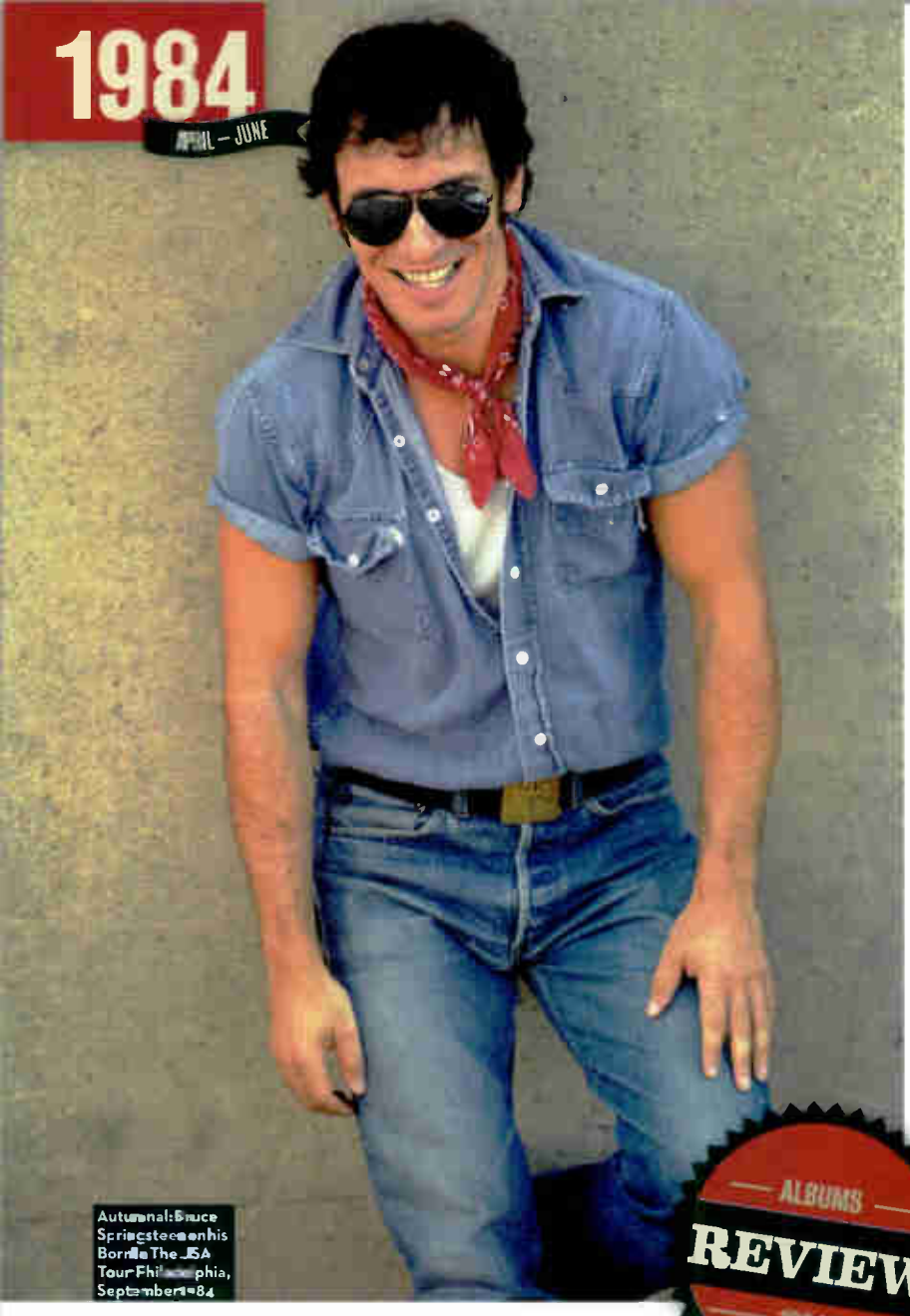


FRANS SCHELLEKENS / GETTY

"I WOULD LIKE TO define this irrationalism as the ultimate principle of infinity in our art, the indissoluble, the homesickness, the yearning for meaning in madness... The continuation of life by other means, including the issues of guilt, ceremonies of expunging guilt, the work of mourning as the reflection of this loneliness of infinity. At its start suffering; and at its end morality." – Hans-Jurgen Syberberg, from the introduction to *Hitler: A Film From Germany*

Don Watson •

November 9, 1984: Nick Cave and Bad Seeds bassist Barry Adamson on stage at the Meervaart Theatre, Amsterdam



Autumnal: Bruce Springsteen on his Born In The USA Tour Philadelphia, September 84

ALBUMS REVIEW 1984

ALBUMS

Bruce Springsteen
Born In The USA CBS

All over Bruce Springsteen's America, the lights are going out, in the bars, in the factories, in the frame houses. On *Born In The USA*, Springsteen is older, even more claustrophobic and increasingly desperate.

It seems astonishing that Springsteen's morbid obsessions – prison, busted marriages and the futility of good times – should have made him such a legend in the American heartlands. The man's a walking museum piece, conceived and formed in the primeval days before MTV, still adhering to the simple, robust formulae of the rock'n'roll music he grew up with. He has more in common with Henry Fonda than with Boy George.

Armed only with some corroded blue-collar dreamscapes (*Blue Collar* director Paul Schrader gets a thank-you on the sleeve, coincidentally) and the mighty E Street Band, Bruce has forged a collection of songs here that ranks with anything he's done, and indeed *Born In The USA* might be his best record. Nevertheless, the last mythic rocker paints pictures of unremitting gloom. I find this rather odd.

With successive releases, Springsteen's version of "rock" has moved further and further from any remaining vestiges of what it might feel like to be a delinquent underage beer-drinker. The stately, ponderous but devastatingly powerful E Street contingent have refined the primitive rock beast remorselessly, to the point where it has become a form of classical music, complete with its own range of references and allusions. Except, instead of being a celebration and a yell of defiance, Springsteen has turned it into a death-knell for things once held dear.

"*We just sit around talking about the old times/ She says when she feels like crying she starts laughing thinking about/ Glory days...*" ("Glory Days'). There is a sort of doleful poetry in Springsteen's Rockwell-bleak scenarios, not always apparent from reading the lyric sheet, and an undercurrent of bitter pride running through his plain man's narratives. By the end of Side Two, though, you begin to wonder why the guy doesn't just string himself up and have done with it.

If you were to boil down the subject matter of *Born In The USA*, you'd end up with death, either literal or metaphorical. Dead relationships, ruined lives, dead-end jobs and dead people. The fifth word Springsteen sings on the record is "dead". The opener, the title track, blasts off with Bruce accompanied by funereal snare drum. It's a veteran lament ("*Had a brother at Khe Sanh fighting off the Viet Cong / They're still there, he's all gone*"), a saga of a man who chose the army over prison and ended up with nothing. Springsteen sings it like a wounded bull, while the band sound like an avalanche.

Among the towering rock structures, you can detect some explicit quotes from time to time – there's the Spector-meets-Motown throb of "Bobby Jean", the Cochran/Holly twang of "Working On The Highway" and the Dylanish "No Surrender". Not forgetting the unpleasant similarity between "Dancing In The Dark" and New Musik's "Living By Numbers", an unfortunate coincidence.

It's the earthy comradeship between Springsteen and his group which prevents this from being a cultural suicide note. On the inner sleeve the band are pictured in monochrome in a shadowy unfinished house, so de-glamorised that Clarence Clemons looks like a plumber, while the rest could be detectives from the 38th Precinct. Age has withered them, but they endure.

It's not quite as natural as it looks, of course. The very format of this music demands a certain melodrama, and in a song like the nostalgic "My Home Town" you might spot the kind of working-class attitudes suggested cosmetically in *Silkwood*, and in the last verse, the kind of bittersweet relationship marketed so successfully in *Terms Of Endearment*.

To that extent, this music is working-man's soap opera, hard facts squeezed into formulae and consequently rubbing shoulder with cliche. "My Hometown", for example, manages to cram racial violence, unemployment and approaching middle age tidily into four-and-a-half minutes, while Bruce never tires of using penal servitude as the core of a song. "*Made it, Ma – top of the charts...*"

But despite the familiarity of themes and forms, *Born In The USA* makes a stand in the teeth of history and stirs a few unfashionable emotions. You may prefer your entertainment a trifle less autumnal, but then again, it's not just entertainment.

Adam Sweeting, MM July 28

BROOKS KRAFT / GETTY

Kajagoogoo sans Limahl: "pathetically tame and meek"

SINGLES REVIEW 1984

SINGLES

Kajagoogoo
Turn Your Back On Me EMI

If hearts of gold made great groups, then I'm sure the Kaja chaps would be up there with the best. But as you well know, the devil has all the best bands and Kajagoogoo try very hard and achieve very little. For all their attempts at providing a vigorous funky base for their well-scrubbed pop, the sound is pathetically tame and meek, while the limitations of Nick Beggs' little-boy-lost voice are painfully evident. He tries to compensate by plunging into falsetto at every available opportunity, but Frank Ifield yodels much better. *MM Apr28*

Bruce Springsteen
Dancing In The Dark CBS

Great commotion in the office with rumours of a new Brucie single. Well, sorry to disappoint you, Mr Sweeting, but this missive from the hero's camp is frankly a load of old twaddle. It sounds more like Meat Loaf on an off day than the mighty Springsteen at his best. A flat-footed beat carries no momentum, and the vocals sound like the death throes of a strangled wino. I mean is this retrogressive or what? File alongside Johnny Cougar and let's forget it. *MM, May 19*

Modern Romance
Just My Imagination RCA

This lot seem to date back to the Eisenhower era, and possibly have a tie-in with Bravington engagement rings. They are very good at it, though. "*Such a lucky guy... soon we'll be married and raise a familee... two children, maybe three... every night on my knees I pray.*" This is Doris Day material, but so caringly and confidently delivered that I rushed out and bought a packet-of-three. The orchestration sways along seductively, with dabs of falsetto and wafts of string. Very romantic, but could form plaque. *MM, May 5*

Everything But The Girl
Each And Every One BLANCO Y NEGRO

Reminiscent of those old Getz-Gilberto-banked-down bossa novas, this is gently pleasant. Tracey Thorn's vocal is pitched low and confidential, but the number only achieves memorability with the entry of Dick Pearce's flugelhorn. Pretty playing, humdrum song. *MM May 5*

Jason And The Scorchers
Absolutely Sweet Marie EMI AMERICA

Sad stories of the death of rock'n' roll abound, but have little bearing on the saga of Jason and his Scorchers. Sounding like something they may once have tested at Edwards Air Force Base; the Scorchers are incandescent like a silver streamliner. "*To live outside the law, you must be honest... darlin'*," snarls Jason, lashing his Palomino with his Stetson and at once converting one of Bob Dylan's finest bons mots from drugged wariness into blunt instrument. In the midst of a guitar comeback, the Scorchers clock in with an unprecedented number of points – this has guitars absolutely everywhere, ripping, tearing and burning. The Scorchers appear to be unhinged Tennessee rednecks, so the public are urges not to "have a go" unless fully tanked on Rebel Yell. *MM May 12*

ULLSTEIN BILD / GETTY

The Cure The Top FICTION

Trying to get to the bottom of *The Top* is a bit like trying to decide whether a happy lunatic would be better off sane. It's silly and sinister, like Syd Barrett. It's selfish, irresponsible, perfectly amoral and completely incompatible with anything else happening now, or indeed, anything that's probably ever happened. It's playing practical jokes where the victim dies. It's Vincent Price in *Theatre Of Blood* – plotting, delighting to saw the head off another nice song.

In a way, it's as carefree and cocky as The Beatles' "White Album", but it never sounds wilfully disorganised. Its logic is strict, just unhinged that's all. We shudder but sympathise, giggling. *The Top* is psychedelia that can't be dated, the sounds and shapes of somebody revelling in an identity crisis. It's a pose on purpose, as preposterous as it wants to be. There's no way I could criticise it even if I wanted to, because it didn't set out to do or prove anything, so it couldn't fall short, now could it? It recognises no values but its own existence; no rules, no precedents, no preconceptions, nothing. *The Top* is perfect freedom.

I've yet to meet anyone who can tell me why The Cure are having hits just now of all times – it's one of those brilliant things that confounds all those theories about only clones of clones surviving. Have we discovered something in Smith's busy lethargy (two bands and still dreaming all day!), and if so, in heaven's name what? Or has Smith uncovered some twitching nerve near our funny bone that reacts instinctively to his whimsical tortures? Whatever's going on, Smith's kept his sulk to himself and done what all the Wellers have been bleating on about; he's escaped his past and wriggled out of the cul-de-sac that we knew and loved to death as The Cure. He's stomached the violent monotony of the wretched *Pornography* and thrown it all up. He doesn't care what we think any more – he's not the guitar hero in black with a head stuffed with Camus, but he could be next Wednesday if he felt like it. He just doesn't give two hoots, he howls when he wants to.

There's not a straitjacket designed by the critical canon that could restrain *The Top*. It could be a joke or anything. Smith's voice is all over the place, play-acting, mock passionate, whining, daft as Steve Harley, devious as Devoto. Where his head's at's something else. Most of the lyrics on *The Top* – "*Dust my lemon lies*"... "*Oh, I should feel like a polar bear*"... "*Shapes in the drink like Christ*" – sound like video cues to egg on Tim Pope to weirder excesses. They circle their subjects like vultures, swooping to peck at some sense, squabbling over morsels, then fluttering away again, glutted with their own being. Every line on *The Top* is a song in itself.

Could it be drugs? "The Wailing Wall" could be an acid trip in Israel. Could it be the Banshees? *The Top* itself worms around similar tunnels. Could Smith be a hippy? "Dressing Up" is a gorgeous acoustic ditty yawning and stretching like vintage String Band. Could it be cunning? Oh, very. Just as "Love Cats" teased cocktail jazz like a cat with a moth, so there are clues in *The Top* of Smith's inspiration. The flutey feedback of "Wailing Wall" is Hendrix's "If Six Were Nine"; the "Give Me It" vocals echo Nick Cave's "Mutiny In Heaven". Smith's a great taxidermist.

Still, attempting to account for *The Top* is like trying to account for someone's dreams; you add up all the reactions and reasons and there's still something missing. The more I think about it, the more I reckon either Smith's gone mad or we have. Maybe both? Who knows? Who cares? Love it!

Steve Sutherland, MM May 5

"Raiding the 20th century"

A black group? Not a group at all? THE ART OF NOISE – the music/information wing of Trevor Horn's ZTT, home of Frankie – are explaining nothing. "In America," says ZTT board member Paul Morley, "it's just a noise – and they responded to it naturally."

TONY BARRATT

— MELODY MAKER MAY 19 —

QUESTION: IF TREVOR Horn is the heart of The Art Of Noise, who are the nose, ears, brain, neck, elbows, legs and big toes? Answer: JJ Jeczalik, Gary Langan and Ann Dudley, the production team who worked with Trevor Horn on Malcolm McLaren's *Duck Rock*.

The Art Of Noise were responsible for the opening shot in the Zang Tumb Tuum label's campaign of action: a voluptuous and frequently vociferous offering that simultaneously (a) avoided the single/12-inch single/album format, (b) instituted a re-ordering of sound quite unlike any other, and (c) reached No 1 in the US dance charts.

In England some would call it a crock of crap, but me, I liked it. Several months after its inception, "Into Battle" and its recent sibling "Beatbox" stand as two of the most appealing visionary records of the past six months. A bom-bom dance beat fabricated from the human voice, car ignition motors performing paradiddles, blown across milk bottles (a sonata of sour cream?) and the scarcely noticed incidents of domestic life became part of pop, the fabric of a new rock'n'roll... or you could point to the funk and say it was soul.

Who cares? What the music is doesn't matter so much as what the music isn't. There is always a joy to be had from the uncovering of the new, the glimpse of the unseen, and while The Art Of Noise, like most developments in popular music, do not spring from nothing, »

One of the enigmatic publicity shots - taken at Birling Gap, between Brighton and Newhaven in East Sussex - accompanying the release of the second AON single, "Close (To The Edit)", in May 1984

INTO BATTLE WITH THE ART OF NOISE

TITLES
battle
BEAT BOX
THE ARMY NOW
DOMINA
MOMENTS IN LOVE
bright noise
FLESH IN ARMOUS
COMES AND GOES
moment in love

ZTT

it's their fresh way of dealing with materials, ideas and even cliches we already know backwards from some other context that gives them their dynamic thrust.

AON toy with sounds, toss them back and forth across the studio, indulge themselves in the wonders of studio technology for the pure sake of discovery. It's a music that takes itself seriously and wears a smile at the same time, wandering through the blurred border regions between parody and tribute to throw forward an intriguing sense of ambiguity.

Albert Goldman had an astute insight into the workings of innovation in pop culture when he wrote the following about the early Sun-period Elvis Presley: "During these years he used his talent to create a music that was essentially playful and parodic. Approaching the pop song in this spirit, he established the basic aesthetic for rock'n'roll. Rock is not simply an amalgam of blues, country pop, etc. This is to define it by its sources and substances instead of its soul. The music's essence lies in its attitude.

"The attitude first comes to expression in Elvis, then in Little Richard, and then in The Beatles. All of these singers are at bottom parodists. They assume the identity provided by a particular style; then, working behind this mask, they achieve the exhilarating freedom of the ventriloquist talking through his zany dummy. Inevitably they tend towards falsetto and caricature... The important thing is to recognise that the root of rock is the put-on and the take-off."

In Sarm West, the West London recording studio owned by Trevor Horn and his wife/business partner Jill Sinclair, appointed press handler Paul Morley leans forward to consider the words. To ensure objectivity he hasn't been told who wrote them or who they are about. He's simply been asked if they could fruitfully be applied to the AON.

"Yeah, I'd certainly agree with the put-on and the take-off bit. That's been a very important element of what we do in this blue building. Parody... you see, people always accuse what we do of being serious. This is a distinction I try to make. I never quite pull it off, but those people who accuse you of being serious simply because you try and do it with an attention to detail and try to do it well, they're usually people that do things so seriously, they're so inhibited and rigid.

"The people who accuse you of being intellectual are usually the ones who are taking you seriously and don't see what you're trying to do is put-on and take-off. And there's a certain thing opposed to the word 'art' or the word 'intelligent'. It's strange, actually, because from intelligence surely will come all the radicalism and all the discovery and innovation people always seem to be thirsting for in their whining about blandness."

This is not to be the usual "band interview", as the presence of Morley obviously signifies. Jeczalik turns up towards the end, but by then the most interesting ground's already been covered. Far from reflecting some awkwardness or casual perversity, the AON's "anonymous" image is a deliberately planned style of presentation. The style of their photographs (no faces shown, often no bodies shown) mirrors a profile kept carefully in the shadows.

Morley, former pet enfant terrible on the *NME* and now a member of the ZTT board, assumes the role of thinker, schemer. If Horn is the heart of The Art Of Noise, Morley's the dreamer. As a writer whose prose finally degenerated into a tediously obscure form of self-indulgence, it's interesting to find that in person he's lucid and direct. He virtually interviews himself, gabbling through his ideas at a furious number of words per minute.

> "There's a certain thing opposed to the word 'art' or 'intelligent'"

The Art Of Noise came together during the time when McLaren wasn't in the studio for the recording of *Duck Rock*, he explains. Horn, Fairlight operator Jeczalik, engineer Langan and classically trained musician Dudley would mess around in the studio, come up with odd combinations of sound.

"And then, because we wanted to develop the unit, the fifth part became... not necessarily me, but the record label, in a way. They became the frame so that the AON didn't become an anonymous, nonsensical thing. Instead of McLaren it was ZTT who gave it shape and content.

"I hated the stereotypical notion of the pop group, and what we've tried to do with everything we've signed – though it wasn't so obvious with Frankie – was a unit of communication that wasn't 'the pop group' or 'the rock group', because it seemed the very format was stifling the amount of creativity or invention that could come through. So the AON was set up as a kind of innovative idea to the group.

"At the moment there's a demand for the instant hit – Nik Kershaw, Sade, Fiction Factory, it's all 'Gotta have a hit' – and we put them on a thing called 'The Incidental Series', as opposed to our 'Action Series', which was mainstream to compete in the charts with the Spandaus and Nik Kershaws, because we wanted to try and generate the kind of patience there used to be once upon a time where a record label was interested enough in the music of the group, as banal as that sounds – to encourage them to find out themselves. So we wanted to see how patient we could be, how far we could take it without people actually knowing what was going on. In England, especially, people got very self-conscious about that."

Is this because people have been conditioned to be spoon-fed?

"They are being spoon-fed, and that's why they respond with complete bafflement to AON, if at all. The response in England was classic indifference. That was quite enjoyable to one extent, because it was a very interesting music and people who'd been decrying the blandness of last year, when something did come along that was trying to experiment in an accessible sense – as opposed to a nonsensical German messing around with noise – there was complete indifference to it."

Was it any great surprise that the record had been so well received in America?

"No, in a way it was inevitable, simply because there's a naturalness there that we don't have here any more; ie, they didn't wonder why it was done, what label it was on, what it meant – for them it was just a noise, and they responded to it naturally. In America, New York especially, AON are thought of as being a black group, and that's interesting as well. Whereas over here the *Face*/*i-D* trendsetters were actually responding to sub-standard AON music, but that was trendy."

Morley speaks of "dredging up" the European tradition and applying it to "a pop context". Perhaps this isn't so surprising; the style of ZTT's press handouts and sleevenotes is obviously inspired by the Italian futurist manifestos, and I've always suspected he'd defend the more outrageous excesses of his pickled prose with references to the absurdism and desire to shock of the dadaists. An inkling that turns out to be not so far from the truth.

The European-ness of ZTT's Propaganda is obvious, the Teutonic flavour of their "Dr Mabuse" underlined by the echoes of German expressionism in the video. But what about AON?

"In a way, they are raiding the 20th century, in terms of it being an incredible century in terms of what's happened, in terms of discovery,

STATE of THE ART

Zang! Zang! Zang!
go Lynden Barber's art-strings as he meets pop cryptographers ART OF NOISE.
Loud photography by Tony Barratt

and combat, the fury of the century, the tension of it. Rock groups just seem to borrow from within a very specific era for their stuff, so it gets weaker and weaker until it just disappears into a puff of Howard Jones.

"What I wanted to do was to reconnect to that time in the 1910s and the 1920s of surrealism and dadaism and futurism that just seemed to be completely lost – the war just destroyed it. To me, there was a great sense of play going on there, and also provocation, and I felt that rock in its known types of provocation had died a death. Punk was the last kick of provocation within rock. So I wanted to dredge up some of this idea of play and apply it to this context.

"So that's the European tradition I'm talking about, that sense of classic ideals and very much a sense of comedy, in fact, ZTT is a very funny label. Not many people get the joke but in fact it is, it's meant to be hilarious. Those that do get the joke have a good laff, because it's meant to be funny. Trevor Horn is a master comedian, y'know.

"Because of certain aspects of our post-Factory presentation, or whatever you want to call it, people think it's over-intellectual, too serious; 'Art Attack', as some teenybop mags have called it. What it usually is is simple intelligence, simple creative energy. It's always misinterpreted as something as dull as art."

I'd go beyond characterising the AON as European to see them as part of a current process of internationalism of music that transcends not just state lines but also crosses the Atlantic, a blurring of boundaries to form a music that owes allegiance to no single nation or narrowly defined cultural tradition.

That in New York "Into Battle" is seen as part of electrofunk is instructive, for the electro/hip hop scene is a ship adrift on international waters. Recorded mostly in New York, its sources are primarily black American vocal traditions and German electronic music. But Kraftwerk draw on funk rhythms from black America and repetitive patterns inspired by the systems composers, themselves fired by the music of the Third World.

It's not at all surprising that New Order should record with Arthur Baker, or that the most belly-rumbling electro record around should be a collaboration between German punks Die Töten Hosen and New York rapper Freddy Love. Neither should it come as a shock that a British record should provide the model for the latest Bill Laswell project. Matrix is essentially Laswell's answer to the AON, even borrowing the 12-inch/45rpm format of "Into Battle". Maybe the only surprising thing is that, given the extent of the internationalisation of the world's economy, music scenes have previously been so parochial.

"What I find interesting about AON," says Morley, "is that it fulfils a certain plan – that in Europe they're acknowledged as an avant-garde group, like King Crimson maybe, and in New York they're acknowledged as a dance group. I mean, the only area where they're completely ignored is England. But I find it interesting that the Europeans have responded to a certain part of it – maybe the cut-up technique of Faust, or something, or the sheer bombastic-ness of Van Der Graaf Generator that occasionally creeps in, and in New York people just respond to the dance feel."

> "Rock in its known types of provocation had died a death"

WHAT I FIND interesting and, curiously, paradoxical about Morley's despair at the self-consciousness of response in Britain is the very self-consciousness with which he speaks of AON and its place within ZTT, the self-consciousness of its presentation and style. He admits that part of his motivation is to get people "puzzled", to present "a challenge". Given Morley's imaginatively-thought-out propaganda offensive, it's easy to assume that a similar self-consciousness was at work in the studio. But when I comment that "Beatbox" seemed to have added quite deliberate references to rock'n'roll, as if they were slyly giving their own rebirth of the form, he shatters an illusion.

"No, that's simply how it came. I mean Gary Langan is a rock'n'roll guitar player, Ann Dudley is a great classically trained pianist. They're not young people making pop music, to appeal to a *Smash Hits* market, they're just old-fashioned blowers – they just go into a studio and blow, they get on with it. Naturally. They don't care about what it means or what it is or any trend or anything, so that introduces an interesting freshness to it."

What comes across with great strength from the AON is the sense of breeziness, of curiosity. Some of the greatest music arises not from a pre-planned scheme or genius-like vision, but from the natural instinct of inquisitiveness. I say "natural", but frequently wonder if everybody possesses this quality, often get disappointed and annoyed when people are given the resources to produce a brain-teasing music and then fail to use them, or even begin to explore what their equipment can do.

Modern studio technology possesses a mind-boggling capacity for creation if put into the hands of those who hunger for exploration, invention and just simple fun. Anyone who's ever tinkered around on a synthesizer knows that it's capable of throwing up fascinating sounds.

So why are synthesizers so frequently under-used?

"That's the point," says Morley. "There's no need to go in with any plan, it just comes up. It's an accidental music. I agree with you. I can't understand how, when you review the singles, you get 90 singles, and why 89 are so awful... because that beautiful room in there (*he points towards the studio*) is gorgeous.

"Anyone who has any dedication to what they do, any creative energy, cannot go into a room like that and come out with some awful record. I don't know what happens. AON records sound like they've been made in that kind of room, whereas you hear Howard Jones or Nik Kershaw or the Thompson Twins, it sounds like it was made in a *mental hospital* or something. It's almost as if they're scared of that room."

Hearing such wonderfully wicked vitriol, I could almost forgive Morley for making Haircut 100 respectable. I've always felt that Morley's sloppily defined new-pop ethic helped pave the way for the new-MOR, in the same way that Callaghan's social-service-cutting Labour government softened people up for the Tory onslaught. Those who sow should reap, you might say.

Me? OK, I forgive. Bitching between writers is like a couple arguing over who didn't put the cat out in front of their friends. And quite frankly, that was then but this is now. The subject of this feature is: The Art Of Noise.

Let us hear what JJ has to say. "The only thing The Art Of Noise has is life, joy, fun. That's what we're all doing it for, we're having a good time. Hopefully other people can buy the records and enjoy some of the lunacy."

Does it take very long to create an AON track?

"It varies. Some are very immediate. 'The Army Now' was half an hour's work. We left it because it had something that reworking would have lost. 'Beatbox' has been reworked several times, so there are no hard-and-fast rules."

Much music seems to have lost a sense of dialectic, a sense of struggling against something. Do you think there are other musics, maybe very different to AON, that will encourage a healthier climate that will enable you to flourish, or do you have an essentially pessimistic view?

"No, it can only get better, because I see the AON as not really ridiculing the situation at the moment but challenging it."

Tell me about the relationship between AON and ZTT.

"Their view of AON is contrary to the way conventional record companies sign bands these days. It's like Paul said, artists nowadays do records and the turnover rate of bands is frightening, and there are very few bands who actually have a long-term plan. Record companies are not prepared for something that may start to turn over a profit in X months or Y years; it's generally singles deals and 'If we make a bit of money on this we'll do an album'. It's a unique situation... it can only get better."

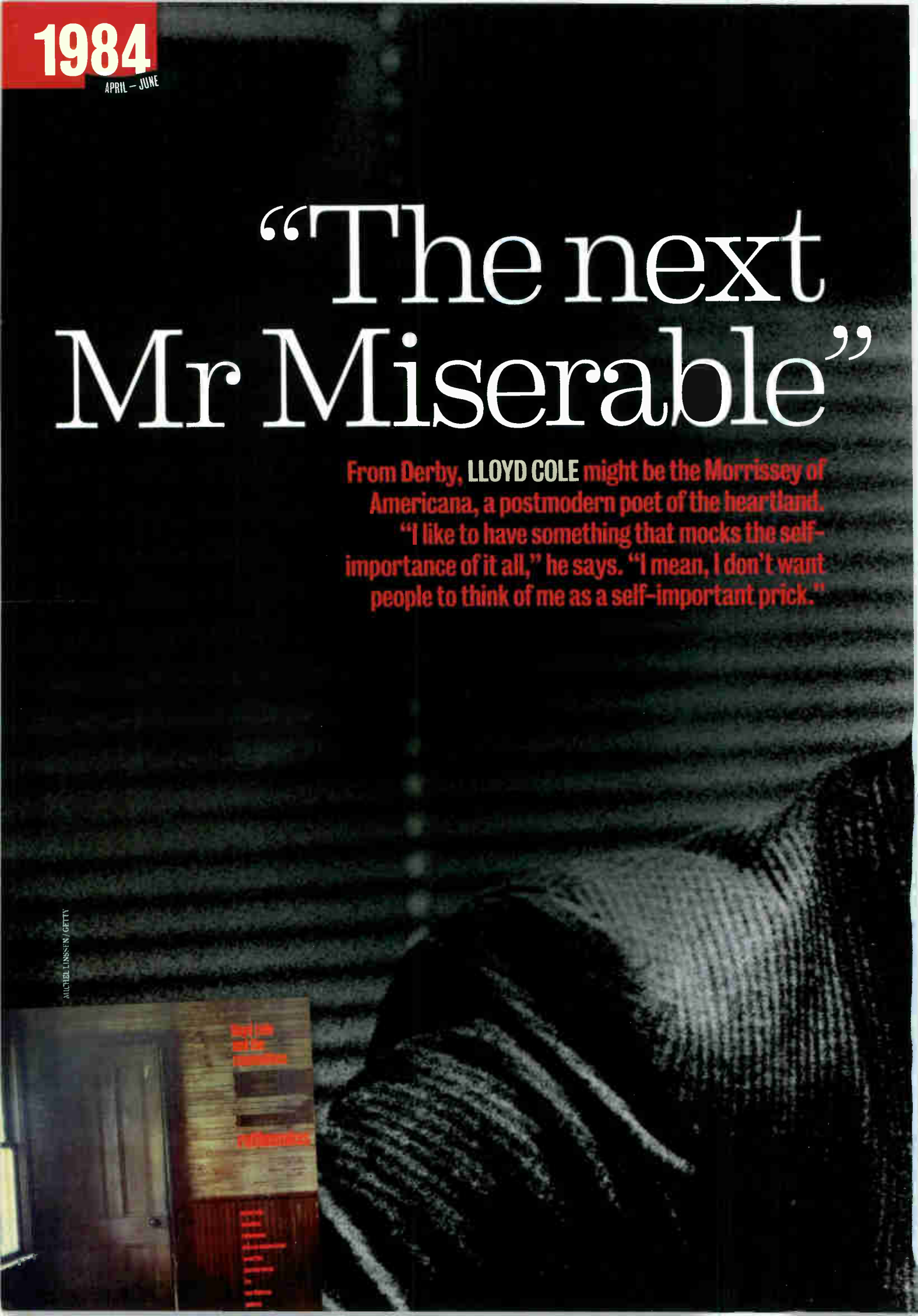
The final word goes to Morley: "It's a jazz music [*though JJ disagrees*] and 90 per cent of it is improvised. And it's going back to a very old-fashioned idea of enjoying music for the sake of it. Now you're not allowed to do that these days very often. So we incorporate a certain kind of calculation, the kind you need to compete with biggies like EMI and CBS. Our idea is that we want to calculate and manipulate, but based on inspiration, based on something with imagination and delight for people. I don't know why.

"The '70s was dominated by ageing hippies; maybe I'm just an ageing punk." *Lynden Barber* •

art of noise
beat box
(dudley-horn-jacobs
langan-morley)
℗ & © 1983 ZTT
the fourth incident
ZTIS 103 A
stereo 45 rpm
published by perfect songs
and unforgettable
produced by art of noise
borrowed from 'into battle'
UNAUTHORISED PUBLIC PERFORMANCE, BROADCASTING AND COPYING OF THIS RECORD PROHIBITED. ALL RIGHTS OF THE MANUFACTURER AND OF THE OWNER OF THE RECORDED WORK RESERVED

"The next Mr Miserable"

From Derby, LLOYD COLE might be the Morrissey of Americana, a postmodern poet of the heartland. "I like to have something that mocks the self-importance of it all," he says. "I mean, I don't want people to think of me as a self-important prick."



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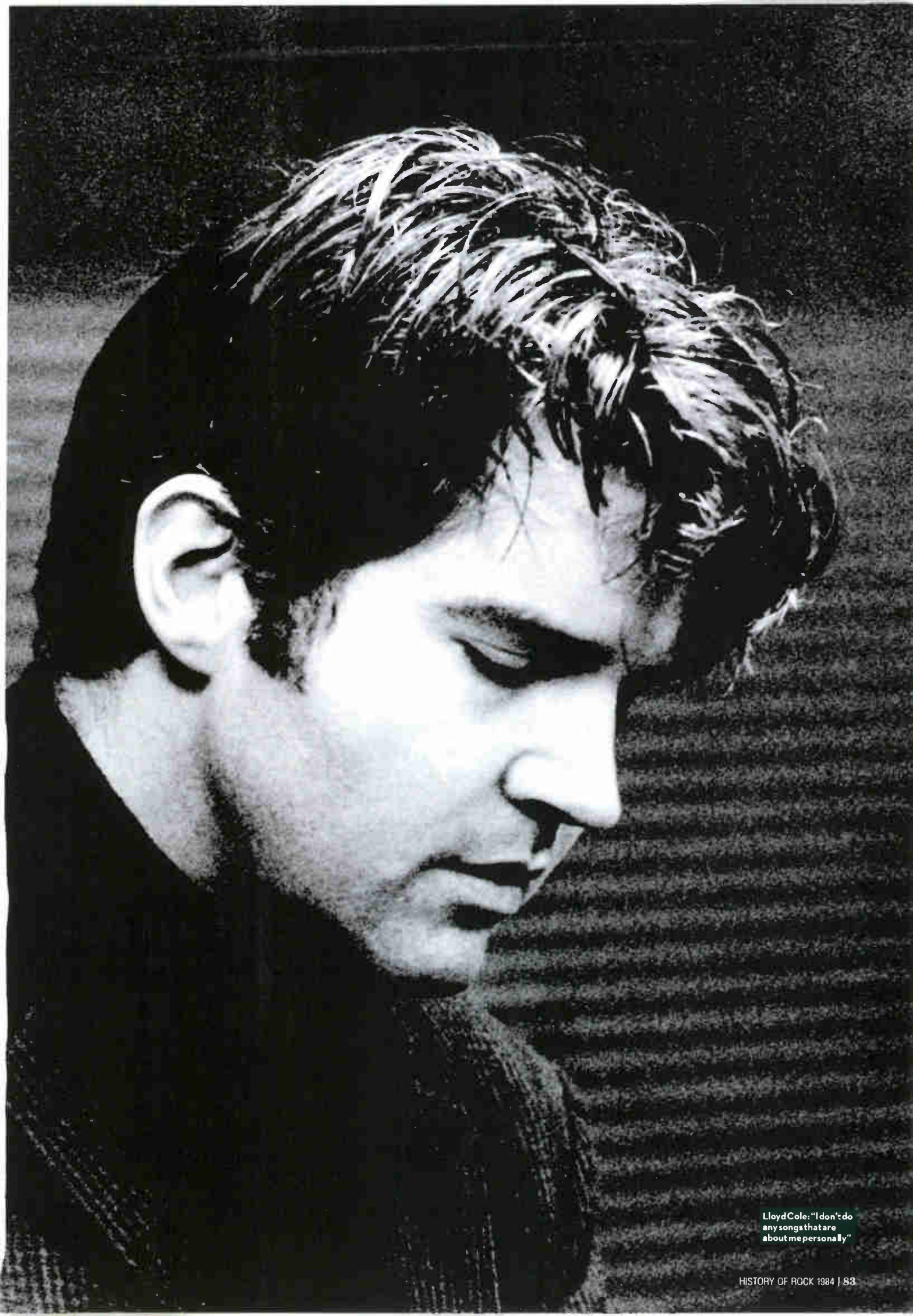


Lloyd Cole: "I don't do any songs that are about me personally"

— MELODY MAKER MAY 19 —

AFTER 10 YEARS, the dream is about to unfold. Ever since Lloyd Cole was 13 he's wanted to be a pop star, and now the fantasy has reached that mysterious cusp which separates the imagination from reality. He's finally on the edge, the threshold, and his discomfort at the prospect is tangible.

Squinting at the fierce sunlight reflected from the Serpentine's diamond-flecked surface, he wonders which strategy to take, which facts to leave in and leave out, who he should be today and what he might be tomorrow. At 23 he's already too old to play this role straight.

His mind is burdened with spectres from the past and present – Marc Bolan, Bob Dylan, Tom Waits, Edwyn Collins, Morrissey... "How would they handle this?" he ponders, anxious all the time to conceal his hesitation. But it's too late in the day to be naive and there's no natural eccentricity to fall back on. Nor can he accept the coolly mannered style of the self-regarding. His preference has always been for those who pursue the maverick dignity of the cynical outsider, the young Paul Newman as Hud finding much approval.

Yet there's another avenue that's closed – not much call these days for rebels without a cause. So, for the time being, the nagging worry that eats away at Lloyd Cole is forgotten, pushed to one side and held at arm's length as the needs of the moment are uneasily confronted. The myth will come later, he concludes, and right now bluff and bravado must suffice.

Like the goalkeeper's fear of the penalty, with the passing of time Lloyd Cole has acquired the writer's fear of himself. He may be sitting in a beautiful park on a beautiful day, but to be just plain old Lloyd he feels is not enough. He wants to be the stuff of legend, but was legend ever that contrived, that preconceived?

His lyrics consciously strive to be great as well, and frequently they do have a special ring to them, a studied wit. And then musically he looks back to the days when it was so much easier to be a pop star, and groups had wonderfully honest names like Lloyd Cole And The Commotions. I think Elvis Costello (And The Attractions) have played this game before, but so what? It's a good game – why not play it again?

It has to be said that Lloyd Cole's music is not spectacularly original, but strangely it is exciting and discreetly magnetic.

Rhythmically, he mixes country with soul, which turns out to be more of a divine accident than anything else, and lyrically he shows all the jagged uncertainty of the mid-'80s menopause. He has a keen sense of melody and each song employs a carefully paced dynamic structure that evokes a fine illusion of depth, but more importantly I should mention that voice.

It's the kind of voice that can make the most simple phrase sound special. Against the scheming, acid lyrics it offers warmth and passion, a schizophrenic counterpoint to a self-effacing verve. It's not just a studio voice either, and live, as they proved so convincingly at their London debut at The Mean Fiddler, The Commotions really are very impressive. An observation which is also shared by Lloyd: "Yeah, we were good that night, but then again we are good – I wouldn't be doing this if I didn't think that!"

His accent is a blunt Derbyshire brogue and he's quite capable of summoning the tenacity to match. "Becoming public is pretty inevitable," he predicts, "because Polydor will buy it for us if they have to. So, I know that we're going to be splashed everywhere."

Then what's left?

"Well, the music, of course, and what I do with this fame when I get it. By then I think I'll only do interviews on certain subjects – I mean, what's the point in just talking about anything? If somebody doesn't come up with something interesting, I'm not going to do it."

IN HIS PREPARATION for pop stardom, Lloyd has bought himself a portable Sony tape recorder. "I need this now to make a note of ideas for songs, because you lose so much time in hotels. Living in Glasgow you spend an awful lot of time at home, and so you end up writing quite a lot of songs – in the Columbia Hotel you write none! It's quite worrying, so I went out and bought a tape machine and now insist that I have an acoustic guitar in my hotel room."

The first Commotions single is "Perfect Skin", a tingling pop song that was written typically from the title out and shows a playful love of language and paradox. A sly story of unrequited love and loathing.

"Funnily, a lot of people have started with a title," says Lloyd authoritatively. "Burt Bacharach did that. The phrases or verses just come after that. 'Perfect Skin' took about a week to complete, but that was mostly tying up the loose ends."

"Forest Fire" was written in the same manner, but more significantly it appears to be one of the few straight love songs in the Cole repertoire. That is until you get to the line "*it's just a simple metaphor*", yet even this can't undermine the song's sense of brooding desire.

"It's very difficult for me to do things straight," he admits. 'Forest Fire' obviously is just a simple metaphor, so that's my little joke, but that song is actually quite serious and I don't write many serious songs.

"There's an awful lot more important things in people's lives than affairs they might have had, but I must add that this song isn't even about an affair I've had. My personal love life is hardly the most important thing in the world, is it?

"So if I do a song like that I like to have something that mocks the self-importance of it all. I mean, I don't want people to think of me as a self-important prick."

Lloyd looks worried again and pushes his hand awkwardly into his thick mop of black hair. His determination to reveal next to nothing about himself while at the same time courting the public eye remains a constant theme.

Wasn't "Perfect Skin" saying something about his feelings towards *Cosmopolitan* chic, though?

"Mmm... I would say that 'Perfect Skin' is just a few ideas linked by a title. It's just like '*Michelle*,

REX FEATURES

The Commotions appear on Channel 4 pop show *The Tube*: (l-r) Blair Cowan, Neil Clark, Steve Irwin (drums), Lawrence Donegan and Lloyd Cole

ma belle...' You know, wee verses that I thought sound good – the literal meaning of the words didn't have a lot to do with it. It was a whole atmosphere.

"It's not the song that will probably be our biggest hit, but it's the song I want to do when people see us on TV for the first time. It captures a lot of aspects that are sometimes only touched upon in different songs. I think it sums up the group fairly well."

I remark that it reminds me of classic mid-'60s Dylan. "Well, that's when he was saying, 'I don't write songs, I just string words together.' 'Perfect Skin' is almost a song about songs.

"Do you know any Rabelais? He used language in much the same way as I'm trying to do, except I can't write long pieces. 'Perfect Skin' is about the longest thing I've ever written in my life – which is probably why I'm in pop music more than anything else!"

At school, kids said Lloyd was a "poof" because he liked Marc Bolan and David Bowie while everybody else liked Slade. "I tended to prefer more effeminate things," he confesses. "That's why I tend to dismiss all these effeminate youngsters around nowadays; because, to be quite honest, I've been through all that."

Wasn't Lou Reed's version of glam so much more provocative and interesting than the new wave of pretty boys, though? "Yes, that's basically why Marilyn and Boy George are so boring. People who are that interested in the way they look, who spend so much time putting on makeup when they could be reading a book, are not very interesting.

"Marilyn's personality is so full of shit and his taste in clothes isn't so good either. Real transvestites are quite interesting people – I mean, I've been in some seedy situations in Paris and I was scared!"

For the record, Lloyd favours dressing down in Beat-generation style, from polo-necked jumpers to cowboy shirts.

When his parents moved to Glasgow to manage a golf club, Lloyd went with them and later took up a place at Glasgow University to study English. He never finished the course. The call of *Top Of The Pops* proved too strong for the more reserved pleasure of Samuel Johnson.

THE COMMOTIONS CAME together round a nucleus of Blair Cowan (organ), Neil Clark (guitar), and Lloyd (vocals and guitar). Later they added ex-Bluebell Lawrence Donegan (bass) and ex-Fruits Of Passion Steve Irvin (drums) in the wake of a failed experiment with an eight-piece soul band, inspired vocally by one of Lloyd's perennial favourites, The Staples Singers.

Armed with his remarkably varied songs and an empathy that gave them a distinct live presence, they quickly established a cult following in Glasgow and the subsequent deal with a major was as inevitable as Lloyd would have you believe. Whether they can scale the real peaks remains to be seen, but success is something they deserve more than most.

Lloyd's photogenic features will hardly be a hindrance. He's got that supremely contemporary look – half baby face, half moody introvert. Sort of Matt Dilllon with a guitar and brain. How does it feel to be a future teen idol, then?

"Well, there's teen idols and there's teen idols," he replies sharply. "Christ almighty, Simon Le Bon's a teen idol and he's a fucking ugly bastard! Kajagoogoo are teen idols and they're all about 30 and look disgusting!

"I suppose this career might enhance my sex life, though. But personally, I think Matt Dillon is horrible – but then again, I think I'm horrible most of the time. The thing is I'm working on it; I doubt if they are."

If Lloyd Cole is unwilling to commit himself in the search for the perfect enigma, he does admit to harbouring a fascination for the brash energy of Americana. The sleeve of the single, which he co-designed, reinforces this ambience, with a picture of a gleaming '50s auto plus legs and high heels on the back seat.

"I do have this feel for America," he says, nodding his head in emphasis. "Somebody like Morrissey can be incredibly English because that suits his character. I mean, The Smiths are the Rolling Stones with Oscar Wilde, aren't they? But they do it so well they overcome it all – Morrissey's got this incredible charm, which is something I envy, to be frank.

> "I think Bowie just wanted to be a pop star, and so do I"

"I've already been portrayed as the next Mr Miserable, which is so far off the mark. I want to make it clear that I'm not in any hurry to commit suicide. I don't think of myself as a tortured artist. I play golf and have fun, you know? My job is to become some kind of individual character which will serve as a reasonable front man for this group I'm in, 'cos we've got to have a character, haven't we?

The problem is, if you aren't that character by birth and all the guises have been used up, where does a poor boy turn? Can he see himself as the next saviour of pop? "No, I think we'll finally kill it off," he splutters. "I think we're too conceptual to be pure pop even though we do use a lineup which is very R'n'B."

Ah yes, the return of the guitar, and in Neil they have a guitarist of great subtlety and craft. Could that be the banner to wave?

"It's a lot of nonsense!" says Cole loudly. "The very best LP for a good few years is *Swordfish trombones* and Tom Waits is playing a synthesizer on that album! And it sounds great!

"But I like the feel of country guitar – it's rhythmic and almost quite flash but not in a show-offy way. It's really lively guitar playing. And country solos are always a part of the song and not some ego."

Balanced against their country leanings is a roots sense of rhythm that reflects the group's interest as a whole in black music. Only recently, says Lloyd, has he rediscovered any white artists worth his time, and gospel music remains one of his true loves.

"Singing is a really weird thing," he muses. "There is something very physical and spiritual about it. Even though I try as hard as I can to distance myself from lyrics. In fact, I don't do any songs that are about me personally.

"I don't want to be a soul singer bleeding his heart out on stage. But the minute you actually start singing you do get carried away. And it's not emotion, because a lot of my songs have no emotion in them! To me that would be terribly self-indulgent. I would never sing about an experience that affected me incredibly unless it was genuinely interesting – and even then, I would never let on that it was me I was singing about."

SCOTT WALKER IS high on Lloyd Cole's list of favourite singers, although he pointedly shuns any kind of melodrama. "The world's not heard a better voice," he notes, "it's quite depressing to someone like myself."

He used to rate Kirk Brandon as well. "He has got a voice – but he definitely has not got a brain! I don't like to be pompous and say this guy is a moron, but he is, and I don't have a lot of room for morons – there's an awful lot of morons in the music business. 'Moron' is a really cruel word, but I've only started using it since I started meeting these morons.

"I mean, this girl from Geffen came over from the States to see us. I said 'How do you imagine us pitched in America!' She said, 'Well, the AOR market with The Fixx and Dire Straits.' I said, 'I hate those groups!' And she said, 'Well, you do write lyrics that are maybe as good as Billy Joel.'"

This healthy disregard for the predictable music establishment is the likely response from anyone with a discerning attitude, but still Lloyd seems intent on fashioning this mythic figure to lead The Commotions on to greater glories. Given the sophistication of his music, his ambitions appear strangely out of line, and ironically, he spends some time telling me how his early hero, David Bowie, revealed himself to be a fraud precisely because he adopted characters as one would a new suit of clothes.

"I think he just wanted to be a pop star," he says of Bowie, "and so do I, actually. I've written songs that will help me realise it, too. In fact, most of the songs I wrote between the ages of 14 and 16 were written because that's all I wanted to be.

"I mean, you do get to the point where you just do it, instead of doing it for some ulterior notice. But one of the reasons I wrote these songs was to be a pop star – I'm going to be quite honest about that. I didn't buy a guitar because I wanted to be a songwriter! I've always wanted to be on *Top Of The Pops* – it's a childish whim! And I still want to be!"

Something tells me it won't be long before this is an ambition fulfilled.

Ian Pye •

"I will kill you like a dog!"

Meet VAN HALEN. Long a mystery in the UK, their single "Jump" has made disciples of the sceptics. Can a backstage meeting with DAVID LEE ROTH and EDDIE VAN HALEN convert the music press, too? The truth is stranger than anyone might imagine...

— MELODY MAKER APRIL 14 —

HAS ABSENCE MADE the heart grow fonder? Has it been banished so long that its cliches seem fresh? Maybe there's a whole new generation uninitiated in its rituals and ethics? Maybe it's just that there's more vitality in its inherent humour than in anything our new pristine pop can master?

Whatever, old father rock is back in favour. Loud guitars and heroic poses. For some folks, in some places, of course, it never went away. One such place is Buffalo, a town resembling the Birmingham bypass snowbound up north in New York State.

"Halen! Halen!" 16,000 teenage good-old-boys and buxom girls – all blond hair, blue eyes, beards (the boys!), faded jeans and checked shirts – are hollering for their heroes. "Halen! Halen!" Burning Bic lighters illuminate the Memorial Auditorium, 19,000 light-bulbs flash above the stage and Michael Anthony drags his bass solo to a close. The crowd screams. He presents his bass to the front three rows. It is shaped like a Jack Daniel's bottle. Yee-ha!

Later, Alex Van Halen will ignite a gong simply by striking it and banks of lights will descend like spaceships around his brother Eddie. Right now, though, there's some serious rabble-rousing going on. Flouncing like Jagger, wearing a T-shirt picturing »

WARING ABBOTT / GETTY

April 3, 1984: David Lee Roth fronts Van Halen at the Meadowlands Arena, East Rutherford, New Jersey

himself and making eyes like Al Jolson, David Lee Roth, singer, sword-dancer and womaniser, is addressing his audience:

"Sounds like we're starting the weekend a little bit early here tonight."

It's Thursday. The crowd cheers.

"Ain't nobody makes a noise bigger 'n Buffalo does!" More cheers.

"I propose to toast to the great, great State of New York!" More cheers.

"I propose to toast to the beautiful ladies of Buffalo!" MORE cheers.

"I propose a toast to all you under this roof here, 'cos you're a bunch o' loud-mouthed motherfuckers!" Mayhem.

He picks on a girl: "Don't you stick your god-damned tongue out at me unless you intend to use it!"

Screams.

"We've got a journalist and photographer over here from England tonight!" I get pummelled on the shoulders by well-meaning oafs.

"They like to come over here once in a while to the home of rock'n'roll!" The crowd bays. "I'll tell you what – it sounds like fuckin' Buffalo invented rock'n'roll, man!" Howls.

"And they tell me the guy who invented sex and drugs comes from Buffalo, is that right?" An affirmative roar.

As for the show... well, it's not that Van Halen are bad at what they do, it's just that what they do is dreadful. One number's funny, two's stretching it, three's boring, though I admit I didn't tell Lee Roth that later. He's bigger 'n me (*cheers*). And I didn't tell Eddie Van Halen that he's the best guitarist in the world either (*boos*), nor that he's wasting himself (*catcalls*).

OK, so I'm chicken.

"**DON'T WRITE THAT** or I kill you like a dog!" Then that noise again; a laugh so infectious, so throaty, it carries as much danger as humour. That's the sound David Lee Roth makes laughing at his own verbal inventions. He constantly surprises and delights himself, holding court, plucking theories from God-knows-where. Little jokes and conceits just appear on his tongue.

His face is about six inches from mine, leering, looming larger than life. His eyes are glazed, his reason running ever more riotous as various post-gig intoxicants rattle round his system. He talks and talks and talks, mostly sense, always flamboyantly.

March 30, 1984: Eddie Van Halen on stage at Madison Square Garden, New York City

LARRY MURANO / GETTY

And he laughs that laugh, from now on denoted by (*L*). Try to imagine it, but you still won't be close:

"One thing I don't see is a lot of personality in pop music, particularly in sturm-und-drang rock'n'roll. What I do see is a lot of strain (*L*), a lot of neck muscles with the veins coming out and a lot of angry posturing. I don't think they're angry; they're selling enough records that they shouldn't be (*L*)."

David Lee Roth shifts mental gears: "It's become a sort of cartoon character. There was a time when leather and studs meant something taboo; now it means *Métal Hurlant* comic book. It becomes a parody of itself – well, once everybody does it, how could it not?

"And, granted, Van Halen has a lot of cliches, but it's something that we feel. You see a lot of musicians, artists in any field of entertainment, mimicking, trying to copy something else specific, it's not heartfelt. They want money or they want record sales or they want groupies or all of them... Hey! I want it too, but mimicry is not the way I go about it. I'd rather please myself and the fellows in the band, and then if Van Halen is lucky, we're lucky in that what pleases us seems to be pleasing the rest of the uncivilised world (*L*)."

David Lee Roth is a disconcerting, down-to-earth space case, a businessman who claims, "I view my whole life as one big art project... admittedly at times it's finger-painting, but nonetheless, art. I create my own world and stay in touch with reality. It's not necessary, it's not obligatory, but (*L*) beneficial at times.

"People say to me all the time, 'Dave, you live in your own little world.' I tell them, 'Well, at least you know me there!' (*L*)"

One of his favourite subjects is girls: "It's an aberration in the big, hard rock field. You don't see a lot of girls present for a variety of reasons, the way I see it. Are you interested? I'm glad you asked (*L*). First off, there's a lot of anti-female lyrics in big rock, a lot of bitterness, a lot of put-down, a lot of victimisation: '*I'm gonna do this to ya/And then in the mornin' I'm gonna do it again* (L)/*And then I'm gonna take my car and do it to ya again* (more L)/*And then I'm gonna do it to my car* (choking with L)...'"

He calms down. "Also the posture on stage is hyper-macho, without any sense of humour attached or without casting a wayward eye at any of the proceedings. Y'know, it all becomes one big Marlboro cigarette commercial (*L*). It's all muscle and grip and men's magazines (*L*).

"I've never written that kind of lyric. My overall tone is extremely aggressive, but then so is my personality, that's the way I am. The strongest lyric I've ever

Van Halen at the 1984 Monsters Of Rock festival, Donington Park: (c/wise from left) Eddie Van Halen, Alex Van Halen, Michael Anthony, David Lee Roth

written in that vein is 'House Of Pain' on *1984*. It goes, '*You say you're gonna!*... er... '*You say you're gonna leave me! 'Cos I only tie you up! I tried to love you tender! But you only like it rough.*' (L) It's completely from the opposite end of the spectrum; there's a sense of humour to it. There has to be!"

I wonder whether such songs are written from personal experience (well, wouldn't you?) or whether he just makes them up?

"The music is always completed first. Edward comes up with six or eight different parts and we band 'em together in different ways – "Oh, that sounds like a verse, play it twice. That's a great chorus. We'll use that... No! No! That should be a verse... Fuck you! Nah! Nah!' We pound it out.

"Then I take a tape home and call Larry – Larry's my roadie; he takes care of the towels and drinks and swords and microphones, etc. He comes down the next day, right after lunch, we get into the 1951 low-rider Mercury painted bright orange and red with a white pin-stripe down the middle, Larry drives and I sit in the back and we drive around the Hollywood Hills and up and down the coast and I write the songs.

"We play the tape over and over again on the stereo and about every hour-and-a-half I lean over the front seat and go, 'Say Larry, what d'you think of this?' (*L*) And, after a couple of days like that, we'll have something. We just drive around in the sun and make it up, so in essence, I guess Larry is primarily responsible for what you hear (*L*). There are fewer lyrics on the *1984* album, though – we had a cold spell in California and I couldn't write any more..." He delays his punchline perfectly. "...It's a convertible! (*L*) What am I gonna do? I'm not responsible for the weather!"

He claims he's written all his songs that way except one, "I'll Wait", which was inspired by Calvin Klein's underwear for women. I wonder whether this is all bullshit – what he thinks I want to hear or, more pertinently, what he thinks his audience wants to hear?

"Not at all," he growls. "I feel absolutely no responsibility whatsoever to the fans of Van Halen." And he goes on to catalogue the fickle nature of fandom. "I don't see why they should feel any differently about our group. You start trying to please everybody, you please no one. We can only be ourselves. Granted, there are some places that won't see the sense of humour. Some people'll write it off as obnoxious verbosity and, in a sense, it is. Others'll write it off as free-form anarchic art..."

He's laughing so much now that I don't know what at. He's losing his track. "I'm not changing shit! It's me! Next to football and religion, this kind of music has got to be the single most therapeutic, primal (*L*) sort of excursion available to us. I really get a charge out of the road. I do it up just fine textbook rock-star style – y'know, play in the Learjet. We have our share of excesses and wantonness... (*L*)!"

I DOUBT THAT SUCH rock'n'roll means anything any more; it exists because it exists, that's all.

"Well, if you mean it's something contrived, it is something you have to learn. Fred Astaire didn't do too badly by that. It's got to look and act like it sounds. Y'know, people come over sometimes and say, 'It's choreographed. You guys learned that move, you do it every night.'

"Tell it to Gene Kelly, baby! (*L*) The world's Top 40 is like an audio shot in the arm for everybody. It's a euphoric; it's a whole lotta caffeine and sugar (*L*). It's an upper, makes you drive faster, gets you outta bed.

"It's the same as when you go down to the Alphabet district in New York and try and score some heroin: 'Oh, here's some Iranian Green. Ah, here's some Peruvian Brown' – 'Here's some Donna Summer, here's some Boy George, here's some Van Halen'... we're all different and we're all being consumed by the radio for no other reason than we're all 128 beats a minute and damn good-looking (*L*)."

> "Don't stick your tongue out unless you intend to use it!"

Suddenly he's back to Europe – Van Halen are topping the bill at this summer's Castle Donington. (They recently played an American festival for one-and-a-half million dollars – incidentally, that's 16,000 dollars a minute!)

"We can take this parade into a different climate. We're waterproof (*L*). You can take us underwater. You can take us in the shower (*L*). You can go waterskiing or mountain-climbing with us... even horse-riding, Steve (*L*)."

He's gone completely.

"We're like a... (*L*)... like a Tampax..."

Ah, but if I write that he'll kill me like a dog. »

ANDRE CSILLAG / GETTY

"OW!" EDDIE VAN Halen tears a scab and blood seeps through his fist into his palm. His head is bowed, his speech slurred and that infamous schoolboy smile's rather more desperate than cheeky. Next door we can hear Lee Roth and the hangers-on redecorating the dressing room with a food fight. Here, though, in his bare locker-room, Eddie speaks slowly and softly.

"I hit walls when I get mad. You can tell which hand I use," he raises his lacerated fist. "No knuckles!"

There's nothing conspiratorial in his confession. Only sadness. I wish I could scuttle away instead of prising open this man's misery, but I try to make light of it. Uh… not the greatest idea ever, for a guitarist to punch walls.

"Well, my wife, Valerie, she talked me into using my feet." He grins sheepishly. He's talking to himself. "I broke three toes, so I went back to my hand… at least until my foot heals. I get, y'know, frustrated. It's not mad really, it's just like… yeaaargh!"

I wonder what on earth could frustrate the man who has everything.

"I'm obsessed with music," he mumbles, "and sometimes things don't go right. We grade each show. Tonight's was only six instead of 10-plus… I'm sorry, what were we talking about?"

I'm sorry too. What we were talking about was "Jump" sitting on top of the charts for five weeks and *1984* hitting Number 2 in the Billboard album chart with a bullet. What we were talking about was Van Halen, the biggest band in America, the band that bears his name, a fact that I'm fast finding out means very little.

"'Jump' was written two, maybe three years ago," he informs me.

Why, then, has it taken this long to record?

"Because I'm supposed to be guitar-hero Joe Bitch," Eddie mutters. "I was told that people wouldn't like seeing me playing keyboards. I disagreed with that, so this time round I just did it."

He's pleased with his independent stand but he's not gloating. In fact, there's a suggestion that, prior to the single's success, there's been serious arguments within the Van Halen camp about the music Eddie wrote for the album – something along the lines of it not fitting in with the band's established image. He doesn't want to talk about it.

"I don't want to cause any more trouble than I already have by writing music, that's what it boils down to. I get frustrated because I have so many things that I wanna do that I just wanna get out. I don't give a fuck if they sell, if people like it or not, I just wanna goddamn get it out of me. It's like taking a piss – my bladder's hurting, I just want it out, d'you understand?"

Indeed I do. After all, there's supposed to be a novel or something equally epic struggling to escape every spotty hack, isn't there?

"There are sides of me that people don't know. They think I'm Joe Guitarist. I don't give a fuck about that. I'm as much of a geek as anyone else. I'm insecure, I cry, I get happy, I get horny, everything. I mean, I hate to blow anyone's fantasy, but I'm just normal."

I didn't think normal people got to meet Michael Jackson, let alone play with him. I'm referring to Eddie's contribution to "Beat It", a spiralling solo that brought him to the attention of an audience previously put off by his album covers. He's embarrassed by all the fuss "Beat It" caused, claims he didn't even know who Quincy Jones was until his dad told him, and lets on that he's glad he didn't know or else he'd have gotten too nervous to play. Seems Quincy just called him up and asked him and Eddie said yes. Lee Roth was holidaying in Haiti, so Eddie had the excuse that he couldn't reach him to ask whether it was cool to go ahead.

Was Jackson there in the studio?

"Yeah, he was there. He was across the hall doing *ET* or whatever. I started playing, he came in and went, quote unquote, (*in a Mickey Mouse voice*) 'I really like that high, fast stuff you do.' He's a great guy, but the guys in the band get uptight when I do outside things.

"I don't see any way it could have hurt; if anything it helped us, but I didn't do it for that reason either. I just did it out of the goddamn fun! I like to play and it's sickening to have no one to play with."

> "It's like there's another me and I trip on myself while playing"

HE TRAVELS WITH a portable studio, setting up in each hotel room. "I'm obsessed with the shit. I love playing with anyone who'll let me, and if no one will, I'll sit in a room by myself and play. It sounds a very selfish attitude, but that piece of wood will never fuck me in the ass, d'you know what I mean? The wife gets uptight. She goes, 'You love that more than you do me', and I go, 'Well, in a way, yes.' Y'know, I can't fuck my guitar, the three-quarter-inch holes are a little too small, but… I'm rambling, I'm sorry.

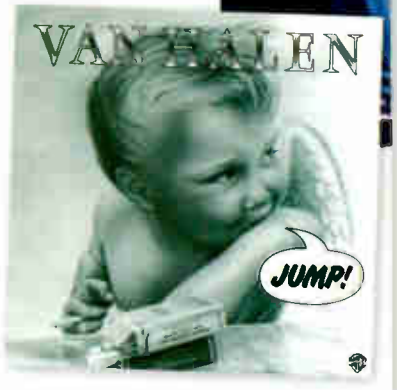
"Certain people, not me, but certain people think I was a fool to play on an album that sold so many and not ask for payment. I didn't want paying. I know that I helped him, that it wasn't until 'Beat It' was released as a single with all the press about me playing the solo, that they started playing Michael Jackson on FM stations [*some are so racist that they only played the solo at first*].

"I'm glad I had something to do with it. Hey, who knows, one day I might want some dance lessons – he owes me one!

"What the fuck? I don't do anything for a reason, especially not money. I mean, Alex and I were brought up to realise that you gotta eat shit before you know what a steak tastes like. My father was 42 years old when he left Holland and came to Pasadena, California, with 15 dollars and a piano – a professional, cookin', smokin', fuckin' clarinet-sax player – and he had to walk six miles every morning to wash dishes to pay the rent. He didn't even know the language!

"That taught me that no matter what happens, if you got the will you can do anything you want, anything. People say, 'Oh, you're so talented, you're so gifted.'

"D'you know what the gift or talent is? The will to focus on one something. Anybody can do what I do if they're obsessed in the exact manner that I am. Y'know, I didn't pop outta my mom with a piano or a keyboard or a guitar… I'm rambling again… I'm sorry."



Van Halen's tour manager tells me later that Eddie's been up three nights solid, just playing. Right now I'm getting his life story. His family left Amsterdam for California when he was six, encouraged by letters from relatives about picking oranges off the trees. "A crock of shit," Eddie says.

His mother insisted that he and brother Alex take piano lessons, but both rebelled. Eddie, inspired by The Dave Clark Five, borrowed 25 dollars off his parents and bought a Japanese drum set; Alex started learning Segovia on a nylon-string guitar, but while Ed was out on his paper round paying back his parents' loan, Alex was bashing his drums. "I got a little bummed out, because he played better than I did," Eddie says. So he stole Alex's guitar and that was that.

It's rumoured that the brothers still fight frequently, although Eddie's full of praise for Alex's drumming.

"I believe he does on drums what I do on guitar," he says. "I don't mean to sound holier-than-thou or egoed-out, but the way he plays, he inspires me. He was inspired by Ginger Baker and, I mean, come on, I don't care if that guy was a junkie or a speed freak or came from hell or heaven or whatever, that guy changed drumming.

"Y'know, there's not another guitarist in the world that I like besides Clapton. I just got the pleasure of meeting him about two months ago at the Forum, where he was doing that Ronnie Lane thing, and I was so nervous and scared that I got so drunk I just blew it… I think he understood." He doesn't sound sure.

Eddie tells me how he used to play *Goodbye* and *Wheels Of Fire* at 16rpm to study the solos. "If there's anybody on Earth that I'd love to sit down and just spend five minutes talking or playing with, it would be Clapton," he says, and gets angry when I suggest his hero's been under-achieving for years.

"That's not true. People can say the same about me. People change. I'm no better now than I was 10 years ago, I'm different."

"Dave writes the lyrics and I'm just not that into it": Eddie Van Halen and David Lee Roth stick to their specialisms, USA, 1984

RICHARD A. AARON / GETTY

WE TALK ABOUT his solos and I wonder whether they're expressive exercises or virtuoso showcases?

"I'm not showing off anything," he insists. "I feel it's my chance to do whatever the hell I wanna do, and every night it's different. It's the most euphoric feeling. It's better... nah, not better, but it's like coming, it's like sex except different. It doesn't even matter whether there are people out there or not, because I actually get off more when I'm sitting on the floor in my hotel room, totally drunk, smoking a cigarette and getting in that state of mind where it's like you're meditating. It's like there's another me and I trip on myself while I'm playing.

"OK, this is a little deep, don't think I'm weird [*his studio in California is called 5150 after the police code for an escaped mental case*], but I feel there's a part of the brain that deals with problems in reality and meditating and yoga or drugs or whatever numb that part and let the other part happen and flow. Just sitting there for hours playing, I start floating and things come out.

"I mean, I think I'm unique as a guitarist. I do weird, twisted shit on a guitar that hasn't been done before. It gets me going – that's the point: I'm still a kid in the playground, and that's the way I approach music.

"Music is nothing but a feeling, an emotion, an expression. I'm not trying to prove shit; I just hope people feel something. Everything I write is a part of me, it really is. I read reviews of 'Jump' or people tell me, 'Hey, that's a great pop tune!' Kiss my ass! It ain't a pop tune, it's just goddamn, downright music. I hate categorising anything."

I suggest it's probably the lyrics that lead to the categorising.

"This may sound fucked, but to tell you the honest God truth, I don't even know a lot of the lyrics to our songs. Dave writes 'em and I'm just not into it. I hate books. I don't read, I barely made it through school.

"I'm serious, I hate books, I hate being told, 'This is the way you gotta do it.' I wouldn't be playing as twisted as I do if I went by the book; that's not gonna inspire anyone to be innovative."

The road manager returns to tell me time's up, but Eddie says he's enjoying himself and is there any booze left to take back to the hotel with him? The road manager goes off to see and Eddie wants to know if England likes "Jump". I tell him we do. "Can I ask you a question," he enquires, characteristically humble. "Why do you think they never liked us before?"

I explain about *Top Of The Pops*, how the video went down well and how a whole new audience was exposed to Van Halen for the first time, not just the metal lot...

He grabs my hand and shakes it heartily, his blood staining my palm. "That's the way we are!" He rejoices, "We're not heavy metal. I'm a musician."

He confesses a bemused interest in the European fixation with fads. "They change styles like I change my underwear," he marvels. "It's almost like they don't really get into the music, they get into the trip of it, what it stands for, what it means."

I explain that attitude's of utmost importance.

"To me it's not. Classical music. What are you gonna call Beethoven or Tchaikovsky? One's punk? One's heavy metal? It's music!"

I venture that the fad fixation serves two imperative functions that America lacks – it perpetually flushes out the clones that clog up the charts after any original artist makes an impact, thus allowing the industry to endlessly exploit novelty, and it also provides the fans with a semblance of motion and mattering, a fun if fake revolt against yesterday's fashion. It's an enforced credibility gap.

"That's what makes me sick," he says. "I haven't changed my hair in the last 10 years. I see no reason to. The way I am as a person and the way I play and the music I make shouldn't come across by the way I look... I don't know what he fuck I'm talking about."

The road manager returns with bottles of brandy and vodka.

"I'll take that one." Eddie reaches for the brandy. "Uh, I'll take both."

The manager frowns at him long and hard. Naughty Eddie.

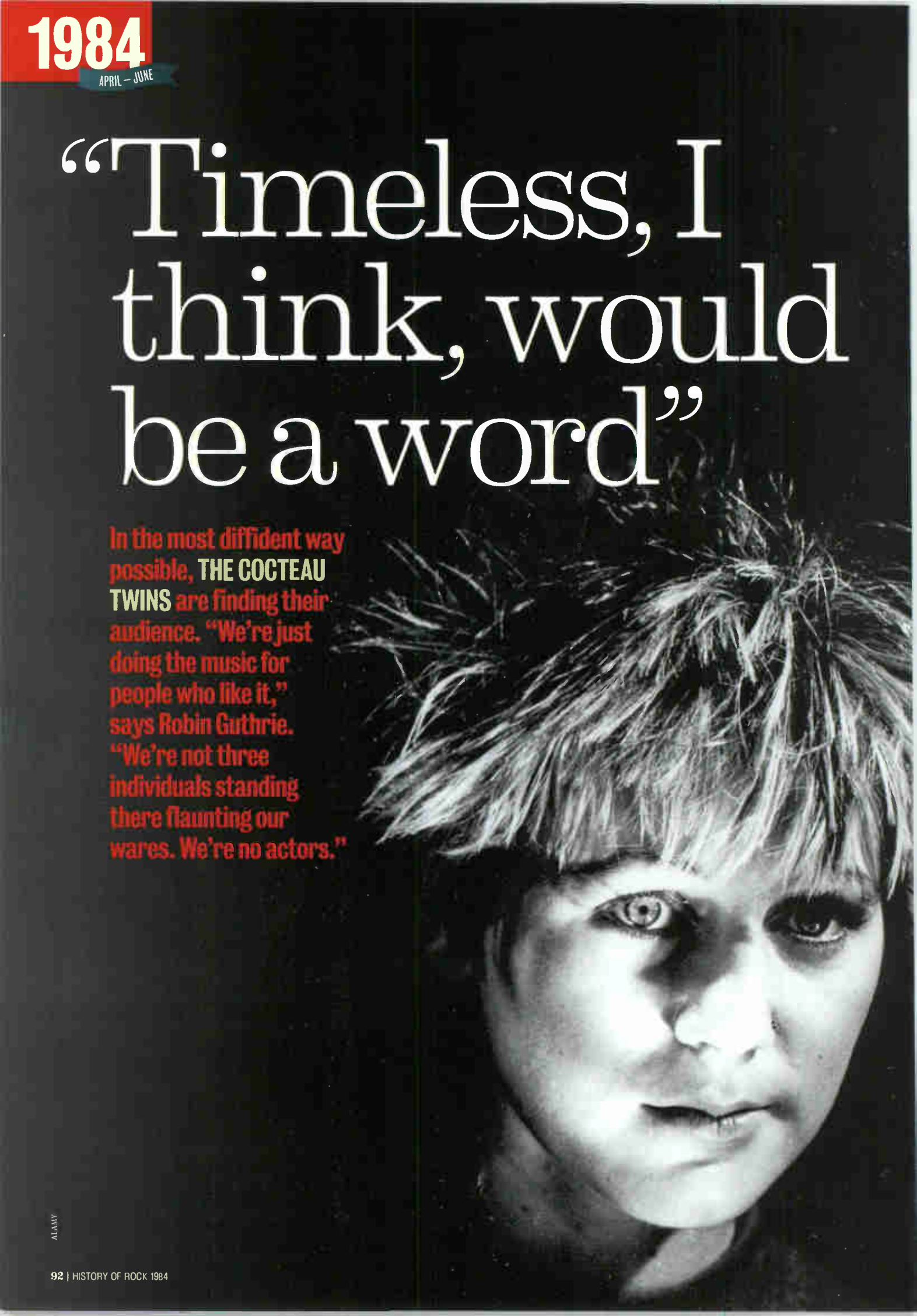
"Uh... I'll take that." He grabs the vodka. "It's a bigger bottle," he grins.

"I guess I'm mentally and physically healthier now than I've ever been," he says, and staggers out the door. I notice the dry drops of blood on the floor. He didn't convince me. I don't think he even convinced himself.

Steve Sutherland •

"Timeless, I think, would be a word"

In the most diffident way possible, THE COCTEAU TWINS are finding their audience. "We're just doing the music for people who like it," says Robin Guthrie. "We're not three individuals standing there flaunting our wares. We're no actors."



ALAMY

Cocteau Twins singer Elizabeth Fraser and guitarist Robin Guthrie, formerly of Grangemouth in Scotland

MELODY MAKER MAY 26

"I THINK IT'S ONCE in a blue moon that you read something interesting in a music paper."

OK then, what's interesting?

"I don't know. It's been a long time since there was a blue moon." Watch the skies....

Every interview I've ever read with the Cocteau Twins has been, in one way or another, about how they don't like doing interviews. I'm determined this one won't be.

"You can only ask the same questions," says Liz.

"It's difficult, we get seen as awkward people who don't have anything to say... sort of bigots," says Simon.

"It always comes over that it's not a case of we don't have anything to say but that we don't want to say it, like we're being rude or obscure or something. We're not," says Robin. "What you're asking us is the same as if you were to ask us to analyse going to the toilet. It's natural. It's not something that's sat down and planned and thought about."

"What makes it so difficult, probably for you as much as for us, is that we really find it hard to talk about, y'know, ourselves, because we're private and being in a group puts you in a position where it's difficult to be private, difficult to forget about all the hoo-ha that's going on and just try to retain the kind of person you want to be and not what other people want you to look like or want you to sound like," says Simon.

"It's really stupid," Liz sighs, agitated, doing worried things with her hands. "It's gonna be like this every interview. We won't have thought about it because, if we didn't start thinking about those things, we'd get really fucked up."

"The trouble with journalists," Robin decides, "is that they think music's a competition, one band against the others."

He's right.

There are three Cocteau Twins here in their manager Ivo's flat – Robin Guthrie and Liz Frazer, two lovers from Grangemouth (she sits on his lap), and Simon Raymonde, a recent addition to the family following the abrupt and traumatic departure of original bassist Will Heggie.

Robin wears winklepicker boots, faded denim and a bootlace tie and has red hair and bad asthma. He's overweight and speaks in a soft, congested Scots whimper that's often (I think deliberately) hard to decipher. He's annoyed that I once suggested in a review that his guitar playing hadn't gone much beyond the Banshees. He calls me lazy. He's right again.

Liz is tiny, like a doll, warm and distant. She wears a stud through her nose and compulsively tidies things, putting magazines into neat piles, washing up teacups, picking hairs off the sofa; she's effervescent with nerves and when she laughs she sounds frightened, though I suspect she's only like this with strangers. I also suspect that it takes a long, long time not to be a stranger with Liz.

> "Our music doesn't go well in places with plastic palm trees"

When she talks it's to herself as much as anything and she repeats herself often, quietly, as if as she says them she's discovering her words have a life of their own. She once knew a kitten that died of leukaemia and she sings in a way that makes me want to weep with joy.

Simon is bright and funny and watches *Brookside* and the snooker. He found a Dinky Toy London taxi at the bus stop the other morning and is pleased to tell me about it. The outsider-insider.

I think these Cocteaus would be happy just making records, no publicity, no nothing. "In an ideal world, yes," Simon agrees.

"Gotta eat," says Robin, "You can't win anyway. If you keep a low profile, people start saying you're enigmatic and all that sort of thing, which is totally false as well."

"There's always the possibility," Simon decides, "that one time you may do something and people will see you for what you really are instead of just imagining what you're like."

I believe, in my blind infatuation, that I was struck by such a moment the first time I saw the "Pearly Dewdrops' Drops" video – stained-glass windows, waterfall, an avenue of trees – simplicity itself, a new light, serene Gothic. Wrong, twice.

They shot the video in Virginia Water, at Holloway Asylum, a Victorian establishment for correction and experimentation. Now, mercifully, closed but available for filming for 50 quid a day. Adam Ant did "Prince Charming" here, though you wouldn't have noticed. The Cocteaus shiver.

There are 2,000 rooms in this Dachau, too many for anybody to be bothered to clear out. The Cocteaus found the mortuary – still, they say, bloody. They found the lobotomy chair, the dungeons, the weird room where even the guard dogs won't go. They found a wheelchair to push Simon around in and they found the records room where huge dusty books say stuff like "Miss Mary so-and-so, admitted June 1, 1840 following five suicide attempts. April 4, 1842, terminated.'

A security guard told them that when the place was closed down, they found an old woman cowering in the shrubbery. She didn't know why she was there, so they checked and

Guthrie and Fraser with Simon Raymonde, replacing original Cocteaus bassist Will Heggie

discovered she'd been committed for being an unmarried mother 50 years before. A lifetime. No one was sure what happened to the child.

I choke on my serene Gothic. And...

"That video was terrible," whispers Liz. "A disaster."

It was supposed to be a surrealist film, not what they consider "a cheap promo, cheap and trashy".

"People see something like that and make up their minds," says Simon. "All this Pre-Raphaelite business, it's all made up, it doesn't mean anything. Just because we had some stained-glass windows in it... that kind of imagery wasn't intentional. We didn't say, 'Look, we want a lot of church windows and angels flying around it.'

"Maybe one shot would have been nice, but it dominated it. It was all sort of religious. We wanted something that wasn't 'the Cocteau Twins in 1984 to go along with *that* single'. It's like putting a label on things, it isn't very healthy."

Nonetheless...

A Cocteau Twins song is like one of those leopardskin-pattern shells you buy in shops at the seaside. It's polished, its contours are smooth but wild and perfectly formed, it once served a function but its inhabitants have since moved on and it's ornamental now, sitting in my room reminding me of when I found it. It's an emotional souvenir, something small to the touch and massive to feel. It's a private thing, something sacred to yourself.

To others it also means something, it stirs their own indulgent memories. The Cocteau Twins are the first noise I've ever heard that I don't want to rush out and share. I'm happy keeping them to myself and I'll never forget *Head Over Heels* for the first time, over and over while Valentino's *Blood And Sand* flickered on the video. That's mine. When I play it now, it's always the first time.

But put a Cocteau song to your ear and you can hear tides like the sea, raging or calm, the crying of gulls windswept over cliffs, the crying of souls drowned or about to be. Pictures, fears, lives, livelihoods, way back and forward through the ages. It's a friend, a provider, an enemy. It soothes, it kills, an existing energy that intoxicates and lets you know you're alive. It tackles things known but unspoken, wells of emotion. Liz's voice can be foreboding as a distant fog warning, shattering as crashing waves, gentle as the backwash scurrying across the same. Always beautiful...

"Timeless, I think, would be a word," says Simon.

But then, pin it down to today and, I suggest, with a perverse twist of understatement, that the Cocteau Twins are reluctant performers. Robin and Simon lurk in the shadows, heads bowed in concentration while Liz switches, exposed in the spotlight, gazing into the middle distance as if transported by stage fright from this world to the next, half scared to death, the way they present themselves...

"We're not presenting ourselves," Simon corrects me. "We're just doing the music for people who like it. We're not three individuals standing there flaunting our wares."

"We're no actors," Robin adds, tersely.

I wonder if Liz really feels as she looks, desperate to escape any awareness of an audience by losing herself in the songs.

She sighs: "When you finish a song and you get ready to do the next one, then you remember the crowd's there again. Or... it can be different. If I've got a whacking big light shining in my face, I can't see anything and I can forget, but sometimes it's difficult to. I try, I have to," she laughs.

Do the atmospheres of the pieces vary according to the occasion?

"Never trust a place with palm trees," Robin states with some solemnity. "Our music doesn't go well in places with plastic palm trees."

In many ways, performing is like going through paces for the Cocteau Twins. It's a chore. Because of the way they record – "We just do it. We just seem to do everything; we make it up as we go along, a song a day" – they're often strangers to their own creations, painfully retracing their steps to reacquaint themselves with their compositions note by note.

Melodies undreamt of

MM MAR 3 Liz Fraser's voice is pushed to breaking point.

MANY STILL ENCOUNTER the Cocteau Twins and hear only Siouxsie. Others hear only The Cure or starkest New Order, but such conclusions draw like veils where they should let in light. The Cocteaus start here.

Head Over Heels, their latest LP, could be what everyone's looking for, a step further on. But it's so guileless, so bereft of gimmicks, that many – even those paid to intuit a little in the clever pop comics – are incapable of rising above first impressions. But fall, really fall, for *Head Over Heels* and it takes that sound and takes off.

Robin Guthrie's imagination may not yet stretch far enough further than *A Kiss In The Dreamhouse*, but Elizabeth Fraser's voice moves beyond lyrical articulation and instrumental texture to a state of rapturous emotion. At the peak of, say, "Sugar Hiccough", she alights on jazz, dips into pop and serves into melodies so pure they've that eternal quality – unheard, undreamt of, but instantly and forever familiar.

Between them Robin and Liz are achieving something moving and new although this was barely evident tonight. Indeed, I'd have been sorely tempted to consider this performance a conspiracy of revenge, a premeditated suicide, if Liz hadn't been driven to tears of frustration.

The voice that can swoop and soar like a hawk, protecting a tune by evasive acrobatics, drawing us up, on and over again and again, was strained to the point of agony. When she beat her chest for release, the voice fluttered and fell, brave but broken.

It's possible that the luxuriant vocal isolation of their ironically successful alter ego This Mortal Coil misled our expectations. It's even possible that Robin decided to take it upon himself to shed the Coil before it took wing and cast a stifling shadow over the Cocteaus. Whatever; I hope I never witness another callous display of gratuitous volume such as tonight's.

It was tragically compelling to witness Liz tortured and raw-lunged as Robin refused to turn it all down and the songs, spawned from some reflected angst, gained new brutal dimensions through this theatre of cruelty. In many ways tonight was a disaster, through I don't believe there's a crisis brewing. It's just that the nerves, embarrassment and uncertainty overwhelmed their confidence, poise and desire. I think this struggle is what Cocteau Twins songs are often about, so next time the outcome may well be different.

And even if it isn't, I'll still gladly be there. *Steve Sutherland*

VICTORIA PALACE LONDON
LIVE!
FEB 26

It's especially hard for Liz: "I get nervous and my throat tightens and I can't breathe, so I can't do anything."

"We've got to play these longish sets now, doing about three or four more songs than we feel happy with. Och, she's just a little girl, isn't she? She gets tired," says Robin.

Liz laughs. Can she articulate what she feels nervous about?

"Well... um... right, the audience, what they expect."

"They've come to expect much more now, Robin explains. "A year ago, we could walk on stage and be quite comfortable, play our bit and that was it, but now people have started paying to come and see us. It's not us that's changed in that respect, it's people's expectations. They just want more and more."

It doesn't help, either, that Liz's vocal technique isn't a technique at all. It's impulsive, its strength wrenched from the threshold of pain, its ecstasy torn from torture. No one else sings this way and Liz has started to realise that, in order to preserve her gift, she must sacrifice certain songs to orthodoxy. Reworking "Sugar Hiccough", singing it sweet and straight, helps ease her throat from ruin. She's also started taking vocal lessons with Tona De Brett, tutor to the stars (well, Johnny Rotten anyway).

"I think she's angry with me," says Liz. "She's getting really frustrated because I sing from here" – she shocks me by punching her precious throat – "and you're supposed to sing from your stomach. But that's just the way I sing, even if I hurt myself."

The lessons aren't wasted, though. Tona taught Liz to breathe properly, and that in itself is a confidence booster. I wonder how she started singing at all? »

"I asked her," says Robin.

"Yeah, but why did I do it? Why? Why did I think that I might be able to do it?" Liz ponders.

How did it feel to discover the voice?

"I was embarrassed, of course. I can't understand it. I haven't thought about it. I'm thinking about it now and I'm baffled. I wasn't pleased. I wasn't disappointed; I wasn't over the moon..."

"It was wonderful," Robin recollects.

"It's funny how things can take shape and you just never know what they're gonna sound like," says Simon. "When we recorded earlier in the year, Robin and I would finish and we'd just be so excited about what it would sound like three hours later with the vocals on it. It was always a complete surprise."

When I enquire after the Cocteaus' standards, Robin's reply is no surprise: "If it pleases us."

They're thankful, in a way, that the video was only shown once, on *Whistle Test*. Not too much damage done. One more week with "Dewdrops" climbing the charts and it would have had to have been on *Top Of The Pops*.

"Uh... we'd have been out of the country," laughs Robin. "You've got to be sort of diplomatic. I don't believe we've got anything in common with balloons and flashing lights. As soon as you're on there, you just bring yourself down to the level of that programme."

"Can you imagine what it's like miming to your own fuckin' record?" Liz whispers. "With those balloons flying about and all those people who've never fuckin' heard of you in their lives and they're giving it the Sandie Shaws and everything... Oh dear! And it's supposed to be filthy in that studio and it's supposed to be so fuckin' small and every fuckin' band's just hanging around waiting to do their thing – there must be some bitching goes on as well."

The Cocteau Twins explained this to Tommy Vance live on the radio the other afternoon. He played their single. He's been playing it all week. The wrong side. They had to tell him on the air!

"He lit about 70 cigarettes and his face suddenly became like flannel," laughs Simon.

"And after we'd actually finished the interview, he was really embarrassed. He said, 'You'll never believe this, but I didn't even know you were This Mortal Coil.' Ha! Stupid Inglese! Oh dear! Oh dear!" Liz is sobbing with laughter.

But it's no laughing matter. Most of our wonderful DJs were under the impression that last year's independent success, This Mortal Coil, were the forerunners of the Cocteaus, not a sideline nurtured by Ivo. The hit "Song To The Siren", Liz and Robin's reworking of the Tim Buckley song, is now something of an albatross, reluctantly sucking them into the mainstream. They were losing control. Everything about the Cocteau Twins is irredeemably separate. They're so obviously an entity apart. Is it possible, with no gauge but themselves, to discern any change, progression, direction?

"I don't think we've got one," says Robin.

It transpires they work instinctively, Robin and Simon putting things down in the studio without premeditation, building up layers, breaking them down.

"Basically, you just feel that something complements something else," says Robin. "If it doesn't, you just try something else."

"It all ties in with what people are like," says Simon. "Other people that think about what they do and have plans about their life, bands that are in the charts write songs for that reason. I suppose because of the people we are, doing things when we feel like doing them in normal life, we do exactly the same in the studio."

The studio's a joy to the Cocteaus. It's here that, rather than expressing emotion, they escape in the act of playing. A guitar can change Robin's mood.

"How do you know why you played what you played? I couldn't sit here and say, 'Such and such is a sad song because my leg fell off that day.'" Robin's being serious.

What's Liz doing while the boys are playing?

"I'm writing. I'm upstairs. They're downstairs."

D'you know what they're doing?

"Just... through the walls."

Liz only writes at such times, with no thought whatsoever for the tone or tension of what the others are doing. Her mind is totally

ALBUMS REVIEW 1984

Ghostly traces

NME NOV 3 Post-This Mortal Coil, the Cocteaus deliver a wafting miracle.

Cocteau Twins *Treasure* 4AD

Oh sure, the music's alright – but look at the song titles! Side One: "Ivo", "Lorelei", "Beatrix", "Persephone", "Pandora". Side Two: "Amelia", "Aloysius", "Cicely", "Otterley", "Donimo" (sic). It sounds like the whole of Hampstead breaking out in an orgy of kitchen-christening.

There is indeed an air of tweeness about these Cocteau Twins, which would be cloying except that their music can rise above it, sometimes to realms of genuine magnificence. Given the delicate precision of their sound, and the extraordinary qualities of Elizabeth Frazer's singing, they get away with things. What could seem sickly and precious in the hands of lesser practitioners is here redeemed by simple beauty. An innocent magic.

It's taken me three albums to feel sure on this point. *Treasure* is surely their best collection yet: it's softer, more vague than before, but somehow even closer to the purity at their core. Where *Garlands* was a tentative reconnaissance of '82's rocky landscape, heavily Banshee-shadowed, and *Head Over Heels* showed a group on the verge of self-discovery, this third LP is a process completed. The Cocteau Twins have never sounded less like anyone else. If I'm reminded of anyone it's the nicer bits of Kate Bush. You may have your own idea as to what the nicest bits of Kate Bush are, but for me it's a certain way of woven melody, a feminine spell that's suggestively mystical and, strangely, peculiarly English. (Except, of course, the Cocteau Twins are actually Scottish, which nixes any potential Grand Theory.)

If I'm reminded of anyone it's the nicer bits of Kate Bush

What you've got on these songs is, mostly, that stately-slow processional beat, Robin Guthrie's chiming guitar, Liz's impenetrable, abstract lyrics. It's the old voice-as-instrument touch, albeit an exceptionally evocative one. And the sleeve art is elegant and mysterious as ever: the photos are like those competitions you sometimes see, where they show you a close-up of, say, a shirt button and you've got to guess it. Is it a microchip? Or a caterpillar's head? What fun!

Yes, it is all a bit hippy-drippy. And yes, it is real student music, destined to waft along hall-of-residence corridors from Keele to Kent-at-Canterbury. No, there's nothing here that's quite as glorious as "Song To The Siren" (performed by the Cocteaus in their part-time guise of This Mortal Coil), nor anything so instant as that recent single "Pearly Dewdrops' Drops".

But it's a pretty thing, this *Treasure*. For all its enchanted-garden Laura Ashley-ness, there's something more than most music does now. Like a sepia-tinted Victorian print of someplace you know today. I like those ghostly traces. *Paul Du Noyer*

Treasure seekers: "Och, we'll just get a deal in America and we'll have loads o' money"

enraptured by words, not just the senses but the sounds, everything about them. Her words are playful, pure, astonished and, mostly, indecipherable.

"That's just like it is!" She cries. "It can be the print, actually seeing the word itself, the way it looks, the shape it's making on the paper... all those things."

She says the words while she reads them, luxuriates in the shape they make in her mouth and the sounds they conjure up in her throat.

"The songs just write themselves," says Robin. "It's like we're getting manipulated or something sometimes."

Liz agrees: "I was gonna say that it's like... who's that woman? There's this woman... and who's that bloke? Oh, it's Bach or someone. She'll suddenly sit down at the piano and..."

"Is this a joke or something?" Robin snaps, cruelly.

"No it isn't," she snaps back. "She'll just sit down and come up with these... I can't remember who it is? Who is it? Gilbert O'Sullivan? He's not dead, is he?"

We all laugh and agree that it's possible he's been dead from the neck up since the day he was born, but I know what she means. Liz feels possessed of another's talents, an agent for another's gift. Does she know where the words come from?

"If I know we're gonna be writing, I start reading. I have read, that's where I get everything from. I have to see the words. I'm never lounging about on the sofa and the film comes on... I don't read so much now."

What sort of stuff when you do?

"It helps if the book's good. Uh... what am I reading? I can't remember the last book I bought."

"*Fungus The Bogeyman*," says Simon.

"Oh, the Plop-Up Book – that's dead good," she laughs.

Liz gave Simon a copy of *Fungus* for his birthday and Ivo gave Liz a copy of *The Magus* for Christmas. This explains a lot. Presumably the songs mean something to Liz?

"Oh yeah, of course."

There must be a certain pleasure, then, in the meanings being secret?

"Yeah. You're not thinking you're really smart or anything, but you're pleased when other people think about them. That's what they're supposed to do. It's supposed to happen for them, not for me."

"It's great to see people mouthing words that you know are totally alien to what they really are. It's good because people are just fantasising and enjoying themselves," says Simon.

What wasn't quite so great was when their debut album, *Garlands*, was released in Japan with a lyric sheet compiled by someone who'd tried to discern the words from listening to the album.

"There's not one line correct," Robin gloats. "There's only about, maybe, four or five words that are actually correct."

"It's so embarrassing," says Liz. "I mean, that's what people must have thought I fuckin' wrote! Never mind... never mind..." She sighs.

I like the Cocteau Twins – they won't let *Smash Hits* print their song words. Communication, for them, is a tenuous thing. They recently met Eno to discuss working on a new album, talked a lot about sequencers and he left thinking they didn't really want him to produce them. He was right, they didn't. They were after a collaborator, so the project remains uncertain in that Cocteau-like way.

"I wonder how much we'd get if we signed to a major?" Robin inquires, mischievously.

"Oh, about a million," Simon replies.

He knows. His brother's been hawking round a rumour that the Cocteaus are planning to leave 4AD, just for fun. No one baulked at a million. Even so, they're staying put. They trust Ivo, consider him a friend, and that's the way they work. Although right now, they are paying themselves a weekly wage, their funds are invested in a new studio and Liz and Robin are homeless, crashing at Ivo's having been kicked out of their rented flat in Muswell Hill. If they signed to EMI, I venture, they could all afford mansions.

"Och, we'll just get a deal in America and we'll have loads o' money," says Robin. "That's what Americans are for, to be used."

Robin always suspected that Americans were daft but now he knows – the Cocteaus played in New York last winter.

"They're fuckin' nuts over there," Liz reckons. "They really laugh at Robin. He was a real sort of curio – they couldn't believe his pointed shoes, they thought he was a freak – and yet everybody, everybody there, was going about with earmuffs on... Not subtle – they were big teddy bear earmuffs, fuckin' crocodile earmuffs. They're over-the-top, those people. I can't get over their clothes."

"Crimplene," Robin snorts.

"No one ever wore anything that fitted them. Honestly, honestly. The things you buy in the shops over there are either too big for you or too small for you – they don't fit anyone. It's incredible!"

"They've got incredibly bad taste," adds Robin. "You always get the cab driver's life story, his marital problems, everything."

"They're so talkative, it's unbelievable," says Liz. "It's like a tape loop or something." She shivers. "I'm fuckin' freezing in here."

I offer my jacket, which she wisely declines, and I enquire about her dress – usually white and long, not exactly Laura Ashley but, y'know, not punk. Liz says the last two dresses she wore were made by someone Ivo knows in Richmond who makes clothes out of old material.

"She's got some things that she can't wash or anything. They're beautiful. They're just incredible. When you're surrounded by things like that it makes you feel really good." I suggest that the notion of fashion is an anathema to the Cocteaus. Simon had earlier dismissed the latest Cure stuff as "fashionable".

"Can't be fat and fashionable," Robin tells me. Two days later I catch him staring into a mirror in the dressing room at the photo studio. "Who's that fat bloke?" he asks and prods himself. "I don't feel like that inside!"

"People who buy the newest clothes and all that kind of thing probably need to because they haven't got any other way of expressing themselves," says Simon.

I'm about to ask Liz whether she always wears cardigans because she's ashamed of her tattoos – one on each arm, "Siouxsie And The Banshees" and I couldn't catch the other – but Robin butts in.

"Liz wears a pretty dress because it makes her feel more comfortable when she walks on stage. She could hide behind that almost... this is getting a bit *Smash Hits* is it not? We should be talking about the music."

I tell them that, in a way, we are and they all retreat into their quiet smiles. Again. *Steve Sutherland* •

> "If I know we're gonna be writing, I start reading"

ALAMY

THE HISTORY OF ROCK

The History Of Rock is a magazine series celebrating 50 years of the music that changed the world – starting in 1965.

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NEED ANY BACK ISSUES? SEE PAGE 144

Readers' letters

MM/NME JAN–JUN Waters picks up flak, the Maker is hexed and other outrages.

Thumb deal

I am writing to complain about the recent spate of advertisements for the new Roger Waters single and forthcoming tour. These adverts – in *Time Out*, *City Limits*, *Melody Maker*, *New Musical Express*, most underground stations, any hoarding space available – are offensive to look at and read. The advert, you must be aware, consists of a back view of a naked woman hitchhiker with the artist's name and the motif *The Pros And Cons Of Hitch Hiking*!

This is obvious comment on the recent court case in which a female hiker was told she deserved to be raped as she had been hitching alone. I find this type of inference doubly offensive. Not only is the advert blatantly using a woman's body in order to make the wares more interesting, the message also implies that female hitchers are "asking for it" and deserve all they get.

I am forced into the position of complaining about this kind of lurid advertising though I am against censorship. I would advocate more sex, less sexism, but this type of misogynistic advertising leaves me totally nonplussed.

I am well aware that I, as an individual, am unable to change the attitudes which produce this kind of dross. I would still rather not have it shoved down my throat every time I open a newspaper or go for a walk. After all, I grew up in the swinging '60s; I am still encumbered by the belief that everyone is entitled to do their own thing so long as it doesn't harm anyone else. (*Right on – Ed.*) However, this advert hurts me, I find it personally offensive. I am a woman and a hitchhiker.

I recognise the deep-seated inhibitions and frustrations which lie behind this kind of attitude. I have known a lot of inadequate men, I see them every day, I work with a few, and now again they have their set of unformed prejudices and inhibitions verified by this crummy piece of second-rate advertising!

POLLY GREEN, Barnes, London SW12 (*NME* May 26)

What difference does it make?

The Smiths are as plain as a packet of crisps. Morrissey's momentary stardom owes far more to music-press hype than it does to genuine talent. He claims he's a genius. Perhaps he is, but only at manipulating the media.

The Smiths' only real strength lies in Morrissey's carefully cultivated image. The eccentric celibate recluse with the baggy jeans, National Health specs and Interflora-endorsed back pocket oozes mock sincerity and invites troubled souls to share his pain. Could this be another Johnny Ray?

When the propaganda's dies down, the press have backlashed and the trendies disappeared, The Smiths musical vapidity will be exposed to the full and the embalming man will sink without trace.

TERRY, Villa Paradiso, Torquay, Devon (*MM* May 5)

PETER STILL / GETTY

This question may sound terribly naive, and I'm sure it will elicit some smart remark, but I'll ask anyway. Is Morrissey gay? What about the rest of the band? You see, living in the US, we don't get much information about new bands, and I've just recently been able to find a shop that sells *MM*. Now that I've totally embarrassed myself, I'll end here.

PATTY GIARRUSSO, Cranston, Rhode Island, USA (*MM* May 5)

'70s-style outrage back in fashion

Help! Is it true that they're going to scrap the John Peel show or move it to weekends? Please tell me how we can stop this. Maybe if Radio One received hundreds of letters supporting John in the 10-to-midnight slot they'd pay some attention? If there are any other fans out there, why not write and tell Radio One what we want.

CLAIRE, Harrogate (*MM* Feb 25)

The crypto-fascist, capitalistic, materialistic, militaristic, nationalistic, NF short-back-'n'-sides mentality of your second-rate brand of toilet paper makes me violently ill on contact. I have no recourse whatsoever except to put a very heavy curse upon your existence. Be warned – I am preparing a hex that will bring a plague of boils upon your staff, ridicule to your establishment and an end to your days. There, I've said my bit, now go back to the void and stay there, you senseless bunch of bastards.

HAPPY THE HIPPY, Pink Fairies for Glastonbury CND Festival, Shakin' Street, Now (*MM* Feb 25)

Prejudice won't keep you warm

Why do you English all hate Duran Duran or like Culture Club, or like Duran Duran and hate Culture Club? Personally, I prefer Culture Club, but that's no reason to hate Duran Duran.

I'm not exactly a Duran Duran fan, but at least I'm not interested in slagging them off to tell someone how much I like Culture Club.

Suppose they've been playing this beautiful record all day long on the radio (and you're a Duran Duran fan and Culture Club hater), and every time they announce that record you forget to listen?

And, oh dear, it turns out to be Culture Club's new single! Would you go and buy it then? Even though you know you've always hated that "poof" Boy George and co? I don't think you would... you're so awfully prejudiced.

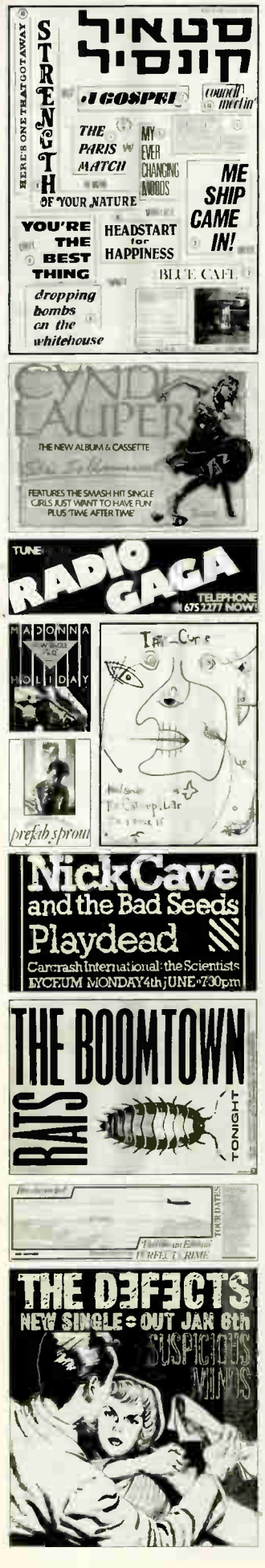
I don't care whether the records I like are sung by Culture Club or Duran Duran. Up to now I've bought more Culture Club records than Duran Duran records. That's probably why I prefer Culture Club.

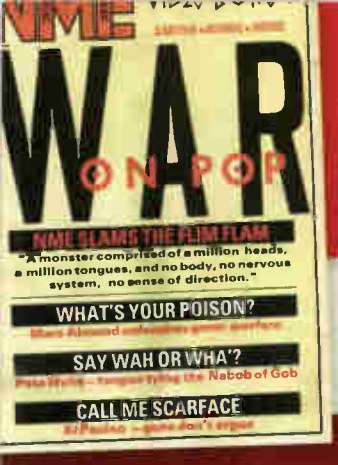
SIGRID CLUAES (?), Belgium (*MM* Jan 21)

And finally

Please, please help me. I met this wonderful girl at the Genesis concert on Saturday. We didn't exchange names or addresses, but I want to contact her. She was wearing a blue *Wind And Withering* sweatshirt, and we both bought tickets from touts and sat by the side of the stage. All I know about her is she's 17. Please, please print this letter.

RAY MEADS, Malthouse Square, Beaconsfield, Bucks (*MM* March 17)




NME
WAR
ON POP
NME SLAMS THE FILM FLAM
"A monster comprised of a million heads, a million tongues, and no body, no nervous system, no sense of direction."
WHAT'S YOUR POISON?
SAY WAH OR WHA'?
CALL ME SCARFACE

1984

JULY – SEPTEMBER

WHAM!, MORRISSEY, THE JACKSONS, JAMES BROWN AND MORE

Emphasis on wife-beating

MM JULY 28 Prince gets stick for the content of his movie *Purple Rain*.

PRINCE OF WAILS: That nice Prince, enjoying his first British hit with "When Doves Cry", is back in deep water. Already subjected to a lifetime's worth of outraged audiences and righteous indignation as a result of his provocative manner on stage, Prince has enraged critics with his new movie, *Purple Rain*.

At a New York press screening of the movie, the hacks were out in force, loudly and bitterly bemoaning the gutter language and the undue emphasis on wife-beating.

Prince, of course, is unlikely to be fazed by such offence: the man is obviously a complete loony who never comes out in daylight and is not of this world. He basically plays himself in the film, and although he didn't actually write the script, much of the film is a refracted image of his own troubled childhood in Minneapolis.

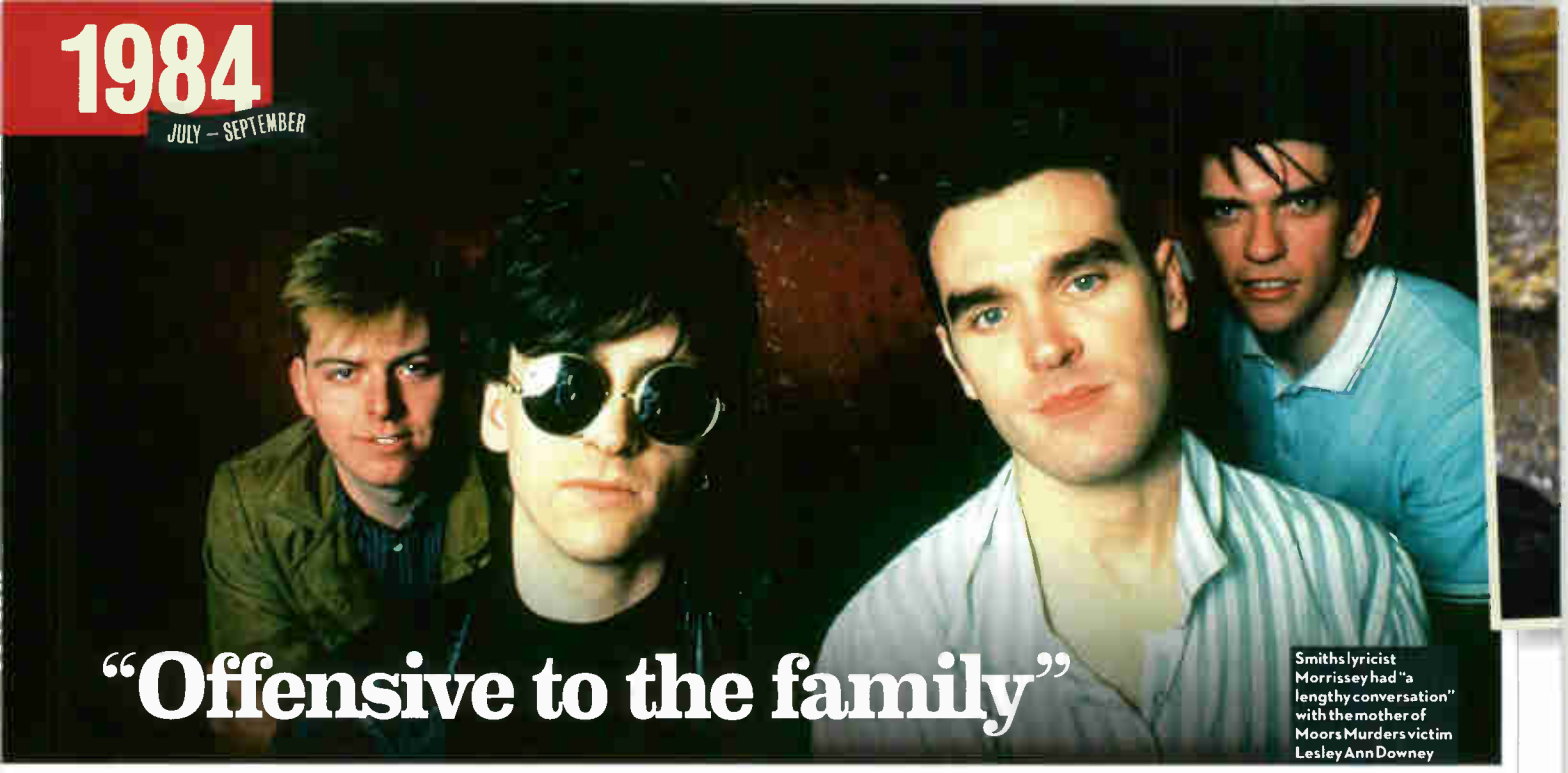
It's ambitiously dramatic, with some whiplash editing and some electrifying concert sequences.

In addition to the *Purple Rain* soundtrack, there are songs from the film which appear on the new Time and Apollonia 6 records. And to further appease amateur shrinks there's a piano piece in it, which is supposed to illustrate Prince's odd relationship with his screen father and was actually written by his real-life father.

Mr Sigmund Freud will be delivering his own verdict on Prince's sanity in next week's *MM*.

ROBERT ROBERTS / GETTY

Prince on stage during the 98-date Purple Rain Tour, which saw the live debut of his band The Revolution



"Offensive to the family"

Smiths lyricist Morrissey had "a lengthy conversation" with the mother of Moors Murders victim Lesley Ann Downey

MM SEPT 15 "Suffer Little Children" causes trouble for The Smiths.

RECORD STORES NATIONWIDE have withdrawn copies of The Smiths' first album as well as their last single, "Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now".

The Boots and Woolworths chains have refused to continue selling either record owing to the lyrical content of a song called "Suffer Little Children". Featured on both the album and the B-side of the single, it's been deemed offensive to relatives of the children who died in the infamous Moors Murders of the '60s.

Although there's been controversy in the past about the lyrical content of the song, which deals with the killings, it's only recently that official complaints have been made by relatives of the murdered children – Lesley Ann Downey (aged 10) and John Kilbride (12).

Boots said: "We had a complaint from the Kilbride family, and as a result we decided to withdraw both the album and single because there were words that tended to be offensive to the family." And a Woolworths spokesman said: "The *Manchester Evening News* telephoned us to say that one of the relatives of one of the Moors murdered children had complained that we and other stores were selling these records by The Smiths. We played the song and we had a discussion. There was an investigation and we decided to take the records off sale altogether."

However, the ban has not been taken up by other major record chains. At Virgin a spokesman said: "It hasn't been withdrawn as far as we know," and at HMV Records the word was that "we're looking into it first".

A spokesman for the group said this week: "The Smiths stand behind 100 per cent of the lyrics to all of their songs and 'Suffer Little Children' is no exception. The song was written out of a profound emotion by Morrissey, a Mancunian who feels that the particularly horrendous crime it describes must be borne by the conscience of Manchester and that it must never happen again. It was written out of deep respect for the victims and their kin and The Smiths felt it was an important enough song to put on their last single even though it had already been released on their LP.

"In a word, it is a memorial to the children and all like them who have suffered such a fate. The Smiths are acknowledged as writing with sensitivity, depth and intelligence, and the suggestion that they are cashing in on a tragedy at the expense of causing grief to the relatives of its victims is absolutely untrue.

"Morrissey has had a lengthy conversation with the mother of Lesley Ann Downey, Mrs West, and she understands that the intentions of the song are completely honourable. Furthermore, he's willing to speak to any immediate members of the families involved so there will be no misunderstanding.

"As for the photograph on the record sleeve which bears a resemblance to Myra Hindley, it is, of course, Viv Nicholson, whose picture was chosen to illustrate the record 'Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now'. The photo was taken in 1961 and was first published in the *News Of The World* year before the tragic event occurred.

"The decision to put 'Suffer Little Children' on the B-side was made well after the choice of Ms Nicholson's photo had been made, and although it is a chilling coincidence, there is no further connection."

"It was written out of deep respect for the victims and their kin"

"Totally against heroin"

MM SEPT 29 Entertainers unite to campaign against hard drugs.

BIG COUNTRY, THE Style Council, Tom Robinson, Marilyn, Madness and Feargal Sharkey are among many top pop names who've promised support to a new campaign designed to fight heroin use in Britain.

The Anti-Heroin Campaign – launched by photographer Simon Gargette and designed by Mac Sullivan – is an ambitious project designed to warn youngsters of the danger of the drug.

Already a number of leading pop personalities have agreed to wear anti-heroin T-shirts on tour and plans are being made for a major "star-studded ball" in London to raise money for the campaign. In addition, a nationwide poster campaign – with the slogan "Heroin is a life sentence" – has just started.

"Essentially, we want to show young people that pop stars and others like sportsmen and women, politicians and TV personalities are totally against heroin," said organiser Mac Sullivan. "It's great that people like Tom Robinson, Jerry Dammers, Madness and Big Country have all agreed to help in whatever way they can." The T-shirts and poster campaigns will be followed by stickers, cards and balloons, and cartoonist Ralph Steadman has drawn two colour illustrations for the AHC. Tom Robinson has already expressed an interest in playing live at the London ball.

It's estimated that there are more than 150,000 heroin addicts in Britain and that £200m worth of it enters the country each year. Fears have been growing for some time over the safety of schoolchildren and other young people who inhale the drug, knowing it only as "skag" without realising it's heroin.

REX FEATURES

Jagger: solo album being produced by Bill Laswell, not Trevor Horn

"Totally mystified"

MM JULY 28 Mick Jagger's solo album will not mean the end of the Stones.

THE ROLLING STONES have this week reacted furiously to "inaccurate codswallop" written about them in the press. One story in the *London Evening Standard* suggested that the group were about to split; that Keith Richards, Bill Wyman and Ron Wood were angry about Mick Jagger's solo album; that Jagger and Richards hadn't spoken for weeks; that the cracks were highlighted when none of the group turned up for the christening of Jagger's baby daughter.

The *Daily Express* reported that Jagger was working on a solo project with Trevor Horn as producer.

"The group are totally mystified by all this," said a spokesman for the Stones' office. "There's absolutely no truth in the rumour about 'cracks' in the band. They're recording later this year. They're going to have a very busy couple of years ahead of them, and they're as far away from any split as they could get.

"It's all nonsense. Mick and Bill are particularly chummy at the moment, and Keith and Mick haven't spoken for weeks because they're living 5,000 miles apart with an eight-hour time difference thrown in. The christening was for the immediate family and nobody outside it was invited.

"For any of the band to be annoyed with Mick recording a solo album is inconceivable. There's a long-standing arrangement in the group that when they're not recording or touring, they can do what they like as individuals. That's precisely why the group haven't split up over all these years. Their solo projects have been countless.

"They're as far away from any split as they could get"

"The whole story in the *Standard* is based on hearsay... The *Express* story is just as bad. Mick is recording a solo album that will be released this autumn, and the producer is Bill Laswell. Mick met Trevor Horn for a drink, but that was purely a social meeting."

Jagger's solo album is said to be "a mixture of all sorts of things... some rock songs, some funky type songs". It's scheduled for release on CBS in October.

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A CONSUMER

MIKE SCOTT

NME AUG 4 The Waterboy shares his Big influences.

Poets
Yeats, Rimbaud, Jerry Lee Lewis

Books and authors
Dion Fortune
CS Lewis
George MacDonald
The Girl In A Swing Richard Adams
The Awakening Earth Peter Russell
The Misfits Of Avalon Marlon Bradley

Drinks
Vodka and coke
Chocolate milk

Places
Edinburgh
The Portobello Road
The sea

Politician
Tony Benn

Soul music
Easter Patti Smith
Dirt The Stooges
Summertime In England Van Morrison

Philosophers
Sitting Bull
Iggy Pop

Colours
Green
Black
White

Poet: Jerry Lee Lewis

"So trendy you even have pickets"

NME AUG 4 Strike action over pay means that *NME* misses some big shows while sitting out an entire summer.

APOLOGIES TO ALL our readers for our non-appearance over the last nine weeks. We hope you've missed *NME* as much as we have.

Our absence is one result of a dispute between the National Union of Journalists and IPC, who own *NME*. Action by the NUJ in pursuit of a 12 per cent pay claim resulted in our non-appearance and the subsequent suspension of publication by IPC until the resolution of the dispute. This came with the union's acceptance of management's 7 per cent offer, with improved conditions. Many other IPC titles were similarly affected.

What did we do during our two months away? Well, the Carnaby Street picket lines ("*NME*'s so trendy you even have pickets," quipped Billy Bragg, one of the performers to offer us a benefit gig, or at least a round of beers) weren't reruns of the scenes outside the nation's coking plants, although the stalwart *NME* pickets ensured there were NO coal deliveries to these offices during the dispute.

What did we miss, besides pay? Some of the greatest gigs of the summer season - Stevie Wonder, alternating between singalongatedium and inspired splendour; and an almost too successful Glastonbury Festival with El Costello outstanding and Morrissey swapping his flowers for tree limbs. The event continues to be the single largest fundraiser for CND as well as attracting a far more diverse crowd that the customary "hippy" sneers suggest.

There were a couple of rare concerts from Dylan, as near to routine as Dylan shows can get; a scorcher of a debut for the British Reggae Sunsplash, and the *NME*/Capital Six Day Wonder - a fab week of new bands organised by *NME* in conjunction with Capital Radio.

Our absence from the newsstands meant that the 18 groups didn't get the crowds they deserved; our thanks to them all, as to Capital, and all you faithfuls who showed up anyway.

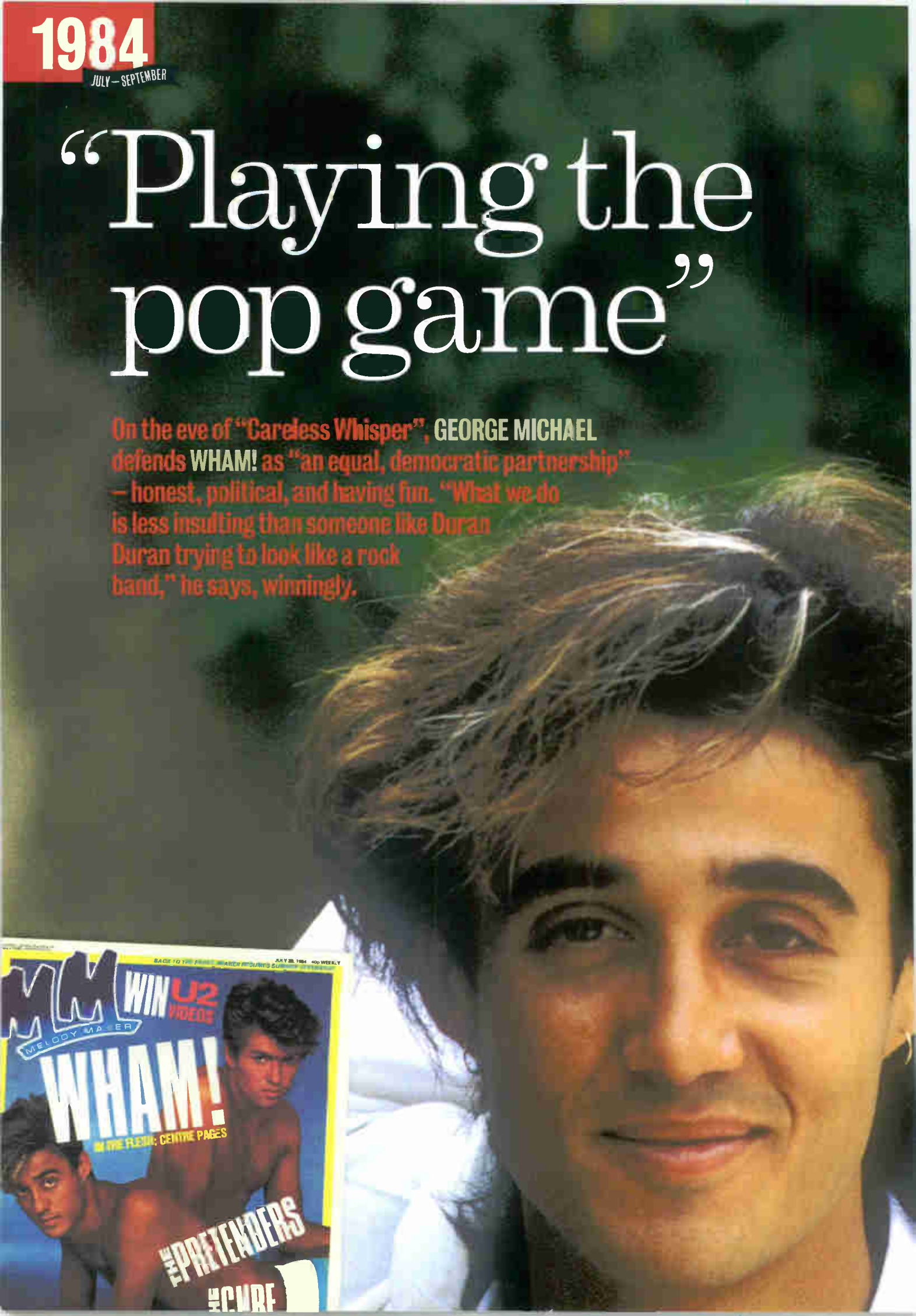
Otherwise we watched the evolution of the "Frankie Say" T-shirts along Carnaby Street, and we still can't figure out just what Frankie say beyond "Relax", "Go to it" and "Work for the fat cats"; rest assured, chaps, we're doing all three already. *Neil Spencer*

GENE SHAW / GETTY, DAVID MAGNUS / REX FEATURES

1984
JULY – SEPTEMBER

"Playing the pop game"

On the eve of "Careless Whisper", GEORGE MICHAEL defends WHAM! as "an equal, democratic partnership" – honest, political, and having fun. "What we do is less insulting than someone like Duran Duran trying to look like a rock band," he says, winningly.



Hitting peak bouffant, Andrew Ridgeley and George Michael of Wham! pose for a photo shoot in France

MARTYN GODDARD / REX

— MELODY MAKER JULY 28 —

GEORGE MICHAEL AND Andrew Ridgeley are sexist, fascist, stroppy, untalented, arrogant, mercenary, manipulative, elitist, despicably commercial, and wholly egocentric.

Or so the papers say, and it's not been unknown for yours truly to cast a malicious stone or 10 in their direction. And before you accuse us of wanton victimisation, let's face the facts.

Wham! are such obvious targets for derision in their sun-sand-sea-and-sex utopia. If they had set themselves up solely as fodder for vitriolic adjectives they couldn't have done a better job. From the swaggering bravado of "Wham! Rap" and "Bad Boys" to the permanent 18-30 holiday posing of "Club Tropicana", they wear their egos on their sleeve, their assets down their Fila shorts and irritating smirks on those perma-bronzed complexions.

As the glossy fan mags clamoured to deify the dubious duo, we possessors of more (ahem) critical faculties searched for chinks in their apparently untarnished armour.

Circulating rumours were pounced upon with bloodlust glee – they were both gay, they didn't really write their own songs, Andrew was merely a stooge for George's convenience, he couldn't even play the guitar he touted on stage, he was only there for his pulling power, two pretty faces better than one – or so the stories went. Fact and fiction blurred so much that each ludicrous episode added fuel to the fire.

Four weeks before "Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go" was released, George was loudly boasting that it would go straight in at No 1. A few weeks after that we heard the absurdly convoluted saga surrounding's Andrew's nose-job. The preposterous ice-bucket-flinging story had been concocted not as an alibi for Andrew's plasters, but as a publicity stunt for their mate David Austin who (by sheer coincidence of course) happened to have a record released that same week.

All this, coupled with their ruthless marketing tactics, hardly dispelled the wrath of unrelenting cynics. It wasn't just the press that made Wham! the butt-end of vicious send-ups, either.

Just as The Smiths' rapid rise brought scorn from rivals, so Michael and Ridgeley's popularity attracted acid rain. "We might be commercial but at least we're not as tacky as Wham!" is a line that's recurred in many recent interviews.

Wham! seemed to have risen to the top on empty merit of a few glibly constructed singles. Adopting a tactic that had successfully plucked Duran Duran from flagging sales figures and transformed them into darlings of the international glitterati, Wham! plunged vigorously into a few sub-tropical videos and then hit the jackpot with the pantomime of the Club Fantastic Tour.

Those shows, once seen, were easily and rapidly forgotten. My review was scathing in the extreme. If George had farted into the mic the fans would still have screamed.

Wham!'s arse-wiggling and crotch-thrusting cued ripples of collective teenage orgasm and the wideboy casuals stood behind the girls, nudging each other with copied bravado.

Wham! were everything they'd been accused of and more. Lacking in content and almost sinister in design, their facile antics might be narcotic to the masses but they weren't for me.

And then a strange thing happened.

As I waded through the review singles one week, "Wake Me Up..." hit the deck and Wham! Bits twitched that had never twitched before. Was this Parkinson's disease or the DTs? It couldn't mean I liked it, could it?

"You making it single of the week was the best review we could have had," George laughs mockingly at me in his manager's office, the scene of our debut encounter. Andrew lounges lazily nearby, gazing disdainfully at the aggressor. They look exactly how you think they'd look, faded Levi's and pale T-shirts accentuating their peak of fitness and deep Miami-burnt tans.

"A favourable review from someone who hates you means far more than another pat on the back. We only agreed to do this interview out of curiosity. We wanted to give you the once-over. And we wanted you to see that we haven't got nine heads." He grins at Andrew, who ironically responds.

"After that live review you did we'd never have talked to you, but then you made us single of the week, but only after saying in the same breath how much you hated us. I mean, why did you feel you had to apologise for liking the single? That's what narked us; we had to meet you after that."

"We didn't want to talk to *Melody Maker* because your hypocrisy makes us sick," George states flatly. "You use our name on the cover to help you sell more issues and then slag us off inside. And then you have the nerve to criticise our marketing strategies. One issue last year slagged us off four times, and yet used a glossy picture of us for the free calendar inside.

"We're only talking to you out of curiosity and because we fancied doing a juicy interview for a change."

He rubs his hands together gleefully.

"We're sick to death of those boring, repetitious questions about our holidays and haircuts and videos. Ask us something nasty," he hackles, "but first tell me why you had to slag us off personally in that single review. Why did your opinion of us as people have to enter into it at all?"

Because, George, as you astutely recognised from the start, nowadays it's impossible to divorce a single or album from a band's persona. Videos, TV, PAs and interviews collectively reinforce a chosen image, what advertising executives would call corporate identity. Only unknown bands can have their records reviewed without assorted mental images springing to mind. It's insanely naive if you expect rigid objectivity. It's impossible when image and product are so incestuously entwined in a relentless audiovisual package.

And from the faded denim dole chic of "Wham! Rap" through to the sequinned Number One T-shirts for "Wake Me Up", Wham! have courted that bi-sensory blending more than most.

"But it's still unjust to make personal assessments of our motives before you'd met us," George argues, unconvinced by the argument that if we had to reserve judgement unless we'd met the particular artist there'd be a stockpile of unreviewed records stretching from High Holborn to Shanghai. Leaning forward eye to eye, he demands my condensed opinion of Wham!, which he wants to challenge point for point. OK then.

How do they come to terms with the fact that their live shows are geared to milk the basest form of entertainment – cheap titillation? Andrew leaps out of his chair, exploding into a diatribe about "missing the point" and "giving people what they want".

George is more reliant on his powers of reasoning and his sincerity, even if his argument is not convincing.

"Why do people accuse us of talking down to our audience? And why do they find us offensive? I think what we do is far less insulting to their intelligence than someone like Duran Duran standing aloof and impassive and trying hard to look like a rock band.

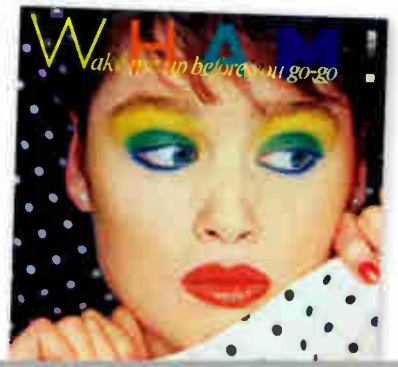
"Alright, so we come on to the crowd, show them videos of our families, of us with hangovers in the morning. But through what you call pantomime we send people home feeling that they know us a bit better than before. If you'd taken a good look at those crowds you'd have seen nearly as many boys as girls, and most of them were older than the 14-16 age bracket that you think is our market.

"The girls were there to be flirted with, so we did – the blokes just wanted to laugh with us 'cos if they were in our position they'd love it. But there was more singing and dancing than screaming. Sure, when we lark about up there it looks ridiculous to you, but that's because you don't see the humour in it.

"Our whole image is humorous, we're playing at pop, playing the game very well, and the videos in Spain and Florida are a part of that. For God's sake, what do you expect us to do on stage – sit in a corner and recite the *Gormenghast* trilogy?

"The reason we attract so much hostility is because we're quite blatant, quite open about subjects that most bands won't talk about. We want to be huge" – he stretches smooth-haired forearms from wall to wall – "that's no secret. We're doing it the same way as everyone else, but because we're frank about our moves and motives we're blowing everyone

> "We want to be huge. We're doing it in the same way as everybody else"



else's cover. It's like we've broken some unspoken code of behaviour."

And in a sense he's right. Wham! are possibly the quintessential pop band, the culmination of a two-decade evolution that's turned short cuts, dodges and formulae into an art form. It's as if they took a demographic survey of what kids would look for in their ultimate pop band and then turned it into reality.

Wham! songs are transient, disposable, and vitally mobile. So far they've flirted on the fringes of Latin American, Motown, rap, soul, jitterbug, funk and disco. Yet no one questions their lack of originality or whimsical changes of image, because this is Pop, Pop whose capital 'P' stands for payola not purism and whose only taboo is a flop single.

"What we're increasingly becoming aware of is that because we mainly do very superficial interviews, people think we're thick," George mutters with a grimace. "They ask the same things over and over till it makes you feel like screaming. Sometimes to combat the boredom we play up and throw in some arrogant statement in the hopes of livening things up, but they never respond. They just go back and print everything we say, like 'Wham! said they think they're the best pop band ever'... They can't even pick up on the sarcasm."

THE OTHER VITAL factor that George is almost over-eager to convey is that Wham! aren't given enough credit for their songs. "Here I am, 21 years old, right! I've written six Top 10 singles, written, sung, produced and arranged a No 1, I've just released a solo single and what do people want to ask me? Where I buy my shirts and what my favourite food is! I know our fans want to know the trivia but we'd like to be given more credit for the thing we're best at – making hit records. And there's a knack to writing hits that people often don't realise."

Sounds like George has been hoisted by his own petard. In defence of Wham!'s relentless pursuit of basic-ingredient pop, he is quick to quote other belatedly recognised talents.

"Remember Motown was despised when it first came out, for all the same reasons we're being slagged off now.

"Look at ABBA – by the time people had realised how good they were it was too late. ABBA just kept releasing a regular stream of faultless, catchy melodies and very clever pop songs. There was nothing fantastically original about them either. They triumphed by being consistently good, and that's what we want for Wham!"

The future seems to hold no fear for George – he's already making plans a decade in advance. "Unless something dreadful happens to me or I get bored with the business, I'll still be writing derivative, catchy, huge-selling records in 10 years' time. My songwriting is getting better all the time. The songs I'm writing now have a far wider appeal than our earlier ones.

"We're not like Duran, whose record sales are propped up by a huge and loyal fan club following. We sold 64,000 copies of 'Wake Me Up' in one day and we worked out that 90 percent of the people who sent it to No 1 would never have bought a Wham! record before. Which proves that they bought it just because they liked it, which has nothing to do with our image or videos or anything else."

Articulate, direct and unbelievably clever at bringing you round to his point of view by devious circular reasoning, George is fun to cross swords with. Worse still, you end up liking him for his audacity. Prod him with the fact that since "Wham! Rap" (its life-on-the-dole lyric seen as Britain's equivalent to Grandmaster Flash's "The Message") his lyrics haven't strayed far beyond the reflected glamour of a popstar lifestyle and he smarts visibly.

"What you're really saying is that we did a sudden turnabout from aggressive to soft, which we can't deny. The aggression in 'Wham! Rap' and 'Young Guns' was real enough, but I succumbed to the pressure of sticking to formula with 'Bad Boys' and I hated that single. It wasn't me. So after that I decided to write from instinct rather than demand and that's why the songs changed.

"Since then we've been called fascists, which I can't understand. We both vote Labour, we're not sexist, racist, bigoted in any way – oh, and we're not gay either," he smiles. "We even tried to take part in a CND benefit at Wembley this year, and we want to do something that wouldn't look too naff to support the miners. The only thing I'm worried about is keeping the music and politics separate."

Obviously to protect the aura and identity Wham! have built around themselves. The potential fragility of Wham!'s new success is also a factor in releasing George's solo work as a completely separate project.

"Careless Whisper" was released on Monday, and if George's buoyant predictions are matched, it'll hit single-digit chart figures within the week.

"Basically, my solo stuff is very different to what people have come to expect from Wham!; it couldn't have been incorporated into what we do. I wanted to release it, so I have. I'm not expanding my horizons in case Andrew and I split up, which is another one of those rumours you'll have heard. There's no question of that. But as Wham! the only constant identity we have is that we're uptempo, lightweight pop. I love writing Wham! songs, but I've enjoyed doing my own stuff too."

"Careless Whisper" is a caressing soul ballad that far outstrips the mixed charms of Wham! releases. This is so obviously the natural element for Michael's richly toned vocals that it's a pity his solo work will be dictated by Wham!'s schedule. Over the next six months they have to record an album (in the south of France for tax reasons!), tour when it's released in late autumn/early winter, release another single in the meantime – and then it'll be Christmas.

George is keeping his best song in reserve for the Christmas competition.

"It's the most commercial and melodic single I've ever written."

More commercial than "Wake Me Up"? Impossible. The new Wham! LP promises to be more of a pop-and-soul album than a disco album. George plans to release another solo single next year – though if "Careless Whisper" justifies its author's confidence, it'll be interesting to see just how much time he'll borrow from Wham! to bolster its success.

WITH GEORGE DIVERGING on a solo tangent, the specifics of Andrew's role in Wham! will again be under scrutiny. George is adamant that Andrew's is not a secondary role. "He plays guitar, is half the image, co-wrote 'Careless Whisper' with me, and if it wasn't for him Wham! songs wouldn't be what they are. Wham! is an equal, democratic partnership and it's going to stay that way."

Andrew, who's done little more in the interview than nod, scowls moodily and rises to the bait. "Just because I'm happy to let George do most of the talking doesn't mean I don't have opinions. It's just that I'm not as patient as he is about constantly having to justify our existence to journalists who never listen anyway."

George inevitably concludes this surprisingly educational joust with a challenge. "Well, you've sat and talked to us now, you've heard Wham! from Wham!. We're not saying that we have no egos – of course we're enjoying this success, that's been our target from the start. We're not covering anything up and we're probably a damn sight more honest in our intentions than some other bands. Having met us, can you still go away feeling that we're con artists who prey mercilessly on other people's vulnerability to pave our way to the top?"

And the answer of course is no. *Helen Fitzgerald* •

In total command: Michael Jackson on stage in Buffalo, New York, August 27, 1984

Jacksons in every direction

NME AUG 11 ...but it's Michael's songs that the crowd want (and get) to hear.

SCARCELY HAD I touched down Stateside last week when I found myself bound in a bus for Meadowlands, in a humid pocket of endless, endlessly irrelevant New Jersey. Dislocated as only an exhausted English rock-crit can feel, I was sped off from CBS midtown Manhattan in a coach that nosed under the river to surface in that nebulous nowhere-land, in tow with the man from the *Sunday Times* and the boy from *Smash Hits*.

The joke of Noo Joizy unfolded along my port side as, in the distance, the sun's bloody ball slid over a gigantic spaceship called Giants Stadium (which hosts football). Here The Jacksons proposed to hold the night's court.

Once we'd made it past the thousand varieties of memento, including a programme that retailed at $10, dolls, gloves, a guy selling battery-operated geese, things started to happen inside and over the stadium (which looked like the end of *Close Encounters*). Choppers danced in the sky like insects, planes rerouted to get a quick glimpse, kids shadow-boxed jewelled Michael gloves.

At one point, when the popcorn-fuelled anticipation had reached proportions of hysteria, a frightening wave effect started on one side of the stadium (how I know not), whereby each section rose and fell in domino sequence, until it reached me. Each time it did, I felt like I was suffocating. Finally it ceased, leaving only the sound of Noo Joizyites, like crickets, talking baseball.

The stage was not small, nor were the various control towers. Nor were the screens on either side of the stage, which can only have been blown-up backdrops from *Bambi* or *Snow White*. These folded away after a noisy and laser-slashed tableau in which a bunch of rather sad-looking ogres called Cretons were vanquished by valiant, armour-plated Randy.

EAST RUTHERFORD, NEW JERSEY
LIVE!
JULY 29

Synthetic thunder rocked the Arthurian meadowlands, while a combination of magnesium and dry ice gradually revealed the five noble knights of the San Fernando Valley. They descended to the sputtering pulse of "Wanna Be Startin' Something".

Start something they of course did. The sight of Michael's white socks blown up a thousand times on the holograph screen propelled countless teenage women into a state of near delirium. My own thought was, yes, that is Michael Jackson, not three hundred yards away, the most famous person on Earth. I'd know him anywhere.

The planes continued to reroute above. Jacksons worked the stage in every conceivable direction. Tito was going this way, Marlon thataway, Jermaine was jammed into his bass. They dodged and dummied and decoyed like American footballers. "Heartbreak Hotel" was an electric shock of colour and jerking movement, "Human Nature" was layered silk, waves of love, and Michael was in total command. Facing us, he was an evangelist preacher on hot coals; facing his kin, he was a drill sergeant. My favourite Michael pose is where he's a sports coach trying to explain a difficult manoeuvre with the flat of his hand. He'll stop, in mid-hop, to pick something out of the night air, to size us up. At Meadowlands, too, he was singing beautifully, swooning on his back for "She's Out Of My Life", long fingers stretching out at the dark but the voice not breaking. Jermaine, in contrast, was pitiably flat on an otherwise hard-cooking "Let's Get Serious".

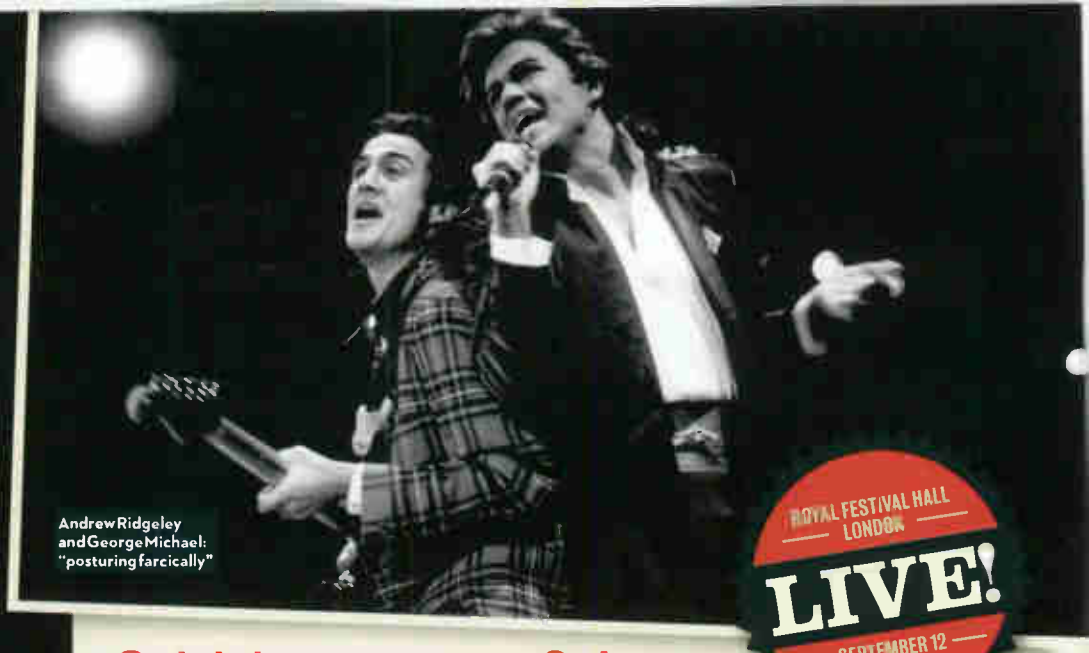
One incidental point: as Michael gets ever sleeker and more stalk-like, so his brudders seem to get butcher and meatier. Randy is particularly keen on flexing his buttocks, as

JOE TRAVER / GETTY

would Jackie be had he not been nobbled before the tour began. (Jackie hobbled on in a Worldwide Nuclear Ban T-shirt, leading one to suppose that he must have tripped over a silo somewhere.) One of the group portraits in the ripoff programme shows Michael, surrounded by his butch brothers in boxing togs, splitting the image of that beautiful fey boy in Visconti's *Death In Venice*.

All the tour's preceding hype had no doubt overworked us, but the clamour for more was not the loudest din your correspondent has ever heard. Back in a salmon-pink space suit, Michael jumped through "Beat It", "Billie Jean", "Shake Your Body", lay prostrate as giant Meccano triffids with purple eyeballs tried to eat him, twirled like a spinning top a few more times, and generally carried on making spontaneously choreographed love to himself.

Fireworks closed the proceedings as I wandered through the squashed franks and spilt cola to the sanctuary of the press bus. By now too creased to form a judgement of the spectacle just witnessed, images of Michael and more Michael swam over the film of my eyes until, with a jolt, I was walking the *Sunday Times* man and the *Smash Hits* boy back to their suites at the Algonquin Hotel. And last night I dreamed Michael Jackson all the way home to London. *Barney Hoskyns*



Andrew Ridgeley and George Michael: "posturing farcically"

ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL LONDON
LIVE!
SEPTEMBER 12

Odd but eventful

MM SEPT 15 Comedians, Weller, Wham! and others stage a miners benefit.

A SILURKED round the back of the hall trying to get in, a small entourage swept past led by a short, greying man, curiously familiar... Arthur Scargill! The teenage girls hovering round the door paid no attention. They were preoccupied with the serious business of waiting for Wham!

A faint aura of culture shock lingered over the evening like a whiff of cordite. The boxes and decorum of the Festival Hall seem more Midland Bank than NUM, but it was full of determined expressions and a keenness to applaud the right sentiments however they were expressed. The critic did not feel welcome, though the event was presumably as much about publicity as anything.

Alexei Sayle kicked off, resembling a bad-tempered grizzly who's woken up to find himself inexplicably sewn into an ill-fitting suit. On TV, Sayle is a chore. Tonight, he was belligerent and very funny, "political" only by inference but scourgingly provocative.

I couldn't hear much of Mike Harding because my seat was in the acoustic dead zone. Still, I heard him say that the miners couldn't be beaten because they had nothing to lose, and this earned a tumult of applause.

Rik Mayall as "Kevin Turvey" was almost exactly as you'd expect, with some convoluted saga about something happening to him on the way to the auditorium. It ended with much talk of "pricks", rather rude in my view. Typecasting in a comedian is even worse than it is for pop stars, who can at least pretend to be actors when people stop buying their records.

George apologised to anyone thinking Wham! would be playing live

The Style Council took the stage for a packed, purposeful set which lifted off nicely with a rhumba-styled "Speak Like A Child". Weller sensibly let the music do the talking, apart from dedicating a lithe "Move On Up" to "all the miners" (hardly necessary, one would have thought). For "Mick's Up", Weller played bass as the admirable Mick Talbot rippled round his keyboards without visible effort. Style Council seem to be shaking down into a versatile unit, with tonight's short display showing a welcome lack of pop-star ego. Weller and Talbot returned to the stage for a low-key encore of "My Ever Changing Moods" and pottered off into the wings.

Still unable to hear much of what people were saying, I was at first under the impression that the man in the dark suit who'd stepped to the mic was some sort of stand-up comedian. However, I realised my error when I caught the bit about "this man is one of the finest TUC leaders this country has ever seen". Heavens, he was Arthur Scargill's warm-up man. Thereupon, Arthur (looking nervous) strode on stage and delivered an impassioned speech, evidently much shorter than his usual workout, thanking the artists and predicting victory for the NUM. Nothing new here, but he brought the house down.

After the interval we had the awful Nigel "Neil" Planer, mercifully brief, then it was Wham! All of Wham!, that is – backing girls, brass section, keyboards, guitars – all miming. George thought everybody had come to see them alone, and apologised to anyone who'd bought a ticket under the impression that Wham! would be playing live. He did add that this wasn't the point of the evening, but obviously Wham! were out to milk their 15 minutes for all it was worth.

We had "Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go", the grim "Careless Whisper", a new song called "Everything She Wants"' and the new single, "Freedom". Dressed in white and posturing farcically, Wham! greatly pleased the three rows of young girls at the back of the hall and left everybody else stone-faced and baffled.

Working Week, dependable jazzers who've seen a thing or two, closed the proceedings with the right air of rewarding application. Ben Watt and Tracey Thorn sang the words to "Venceremos" with astounding ineptitude, then the band lit up for the long instrumental passage and left us sizzling. It had been an odd but eventful night. *Adam Sweeting*

EXPRESS NEWSPAPERS / GETTY

"The intention was to be a hero"

An unexpected kind of meeting with JAMES BROWN. What begins as a junket for his new single with AFRIKA BAMBAATAA becomes an insight into how a major star succeeds, prospers and endures. "I'd love to record with Streisand," says JB. "That would definitely be good for humanity and for artistic merit."

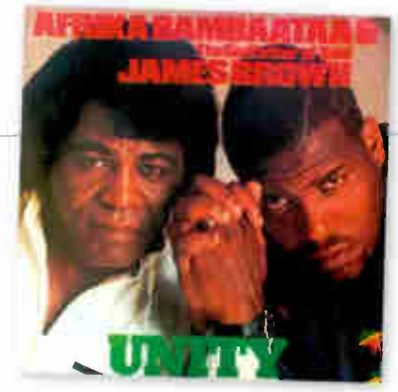
$EX MACHINE TODAY

Funky President? Soul Godfather?

Republican JAMES BROWN lays the '80s rap on a

King of hip hop Afrika Bambaataa and godfather of funk James Brown, collaborators on the Tommy Boy single "Unity", summer 1984

JOE STEVENS



"They want me to work with Aretha, but I chose Bambaataa"

— NME SEPTEMBER 1 —

WHAT DO YOU think of when you think of James Brown?

A stretcher case raddled with emotional pain dragging himself back from endless encores of "Please Please Please"?

The self-proclaimed, undisputed Godfather Of Soul roving across his kingdom in his robes and finery giving strength and supplication to the weak and weary masses? The man who stopped a race riot? A pompadour quiff dripping a sheen of sweat over his face? Rubber-limbed knee jerks, full-length splits and heel swivels? One of the finest musical brains of the past 25 years? A larger-than-life presence. The speed. The grace. The glory?

Laydeez and gennelmen – the star of the show, hard-working, Mr Dynamite... Jaaaaaymes Brown.

Or, are you ready for this James Brown wrapped in a bathrobe, coolly appraising himself in front of his bedroom mirror with his hair wrapped in pink rollers. Would you believe it? The Man's Man Sex Machine Brother Rapp Minister Of The New Super Heavy Funk with huge plastic combs to give his nylon-textured locks that permed flounce and parting!

IF YOU WERE around his hotel room the morning before the start of his three-day assault on The New Music Seminar in New York's Hilton Hotel, you'd see how the rollers are just part of his elaborate and well-established process of readying himself to meet the press and public. Inside their bedroom, his wife Alfie busies herself with the various makeups, toners and highlighters that will improve his features without making him look like one of those over-painted honkys who seemed to have colonised the charts while James has been elsewhere.

Then there is the extensive wardrobe of clothes designed to make this small, corpulent 56-year-old look solid and imposing rather than the glutinous overweight mass that one suspects lies under the carefully tailored cloth. He is also on a diet specially planned by Gertrude Stein, his wardrobe mistress and weight-watcher for the past 20 years.

Obviously no spring chicken herself, Ms Stein, a tall, quiet lady in a white crimplene frock with a mild case of varicose veins, had quite a hard task. Because while Mister Brown, as everyone in his select entourage refers to him, nibbles on cornflakes and sliced bananas at breakfast and delicate little canapes for a lunchtime snack as he plays Funky President-in-waiting, when at home in his Augusta, Georgia, mansion, he is no stranger to the joys of Southern-style home cooking.

The extra flesh is there to prove it, but the careful preparation pays off and Mr Brown looks smart, cool and, yes, imposing. It's still a bit disconcerting when you see him swagger across the floor of his hotel suite or strutting downtown New York with the butt wriggling and that rolling cowboy gait in full swing. Still, pink rollers! That wasn't going to be too easy to forget. That was a real shocker.

On the Hilton's 44th floor is the Presidential Suite. Richard Nixon stayed here with his wife Pat in the middle of some of his corrupt dealings. The main room has oak-panelled bookshelves with a veritable library of American literature, various items of engraved antique furniture and a swish polished-ballroom floor. Windows the size of a small football pitch look over the broad sweep of the Manhattan skyline, and beside the windows sits a large Steinway.

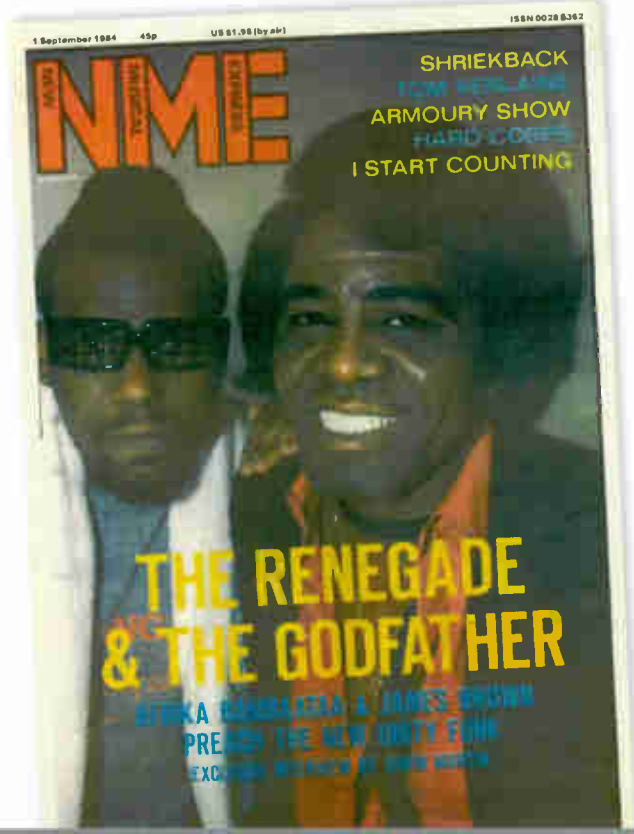
Various people from Tommy Boy Records and the James Brown entourage mill around the main room and kitchen (where there's a bar with an extensive supply of Perrier water). At the top of the spiral staircase, James finishes off his preparations.

As I wait for his arrival, the girl from Tommy Boy introduces me to Alfie, the fourth or fifth Mrs Brown, who's now busying herself with some knitting. A good few years JB's junior, she's fairly plump and squat, with a bouffant of back-combed black hair and a well-powdered white face. Later in the day, somebody tells her she looks like Joan Collins and she's not amused, at all.

Also there throughout the three days is Mr Henry Stallings, hardest working manager of the hardest-working man in show business, and Willie Glenn, a friend of James since schooldays, now employed as a general assistant. His chief function seems to be to give wholehearted support and agreement to the craziest statements and conjectures made by his friend and keeper. Some of Brown's male offspring by previous marriages and his newest collaborator – Overlord Of The Zulu Nation, self-proclaimed, undisputed King Of Hip Hop, Afrika Bambaataa – are also present.

It's only after flying 3,000 miles from London and about three minutes before the interview that I'm taken aside by the girl from Tommy Boy and told there are three areas to avoid – politics, religion and colour. A James Brown interview without politics or religion wasn't exactly the sort of interview I'd been preparing for. The thought that I'd had when the trip was first proposed began to niggle. It was that Brown had only decided to do interviews as part of the deal struck with Tommy Boy for his collaboration with Bambaataa on the megamix "Unity" (it was rumoured he was given an unconditional payment of $30,000 for his part in the recording) and not to delve into the brilliance and complexity of one of the most amazing success stories and catalogues of recorded work in the whole of history.

Suddenly there he is descending the stairs in a wide flapping casino hustler suit, aviator shades, and a ruffled red shirt. Patent leather shoes click on the floor as he strides over to the piano to run through an old song that he never got round to recording. Tune called "Honeydripping", and it's a fine version.



"Boogie-woogie!" yells James as he goes for an extended run between verses.

"I wish I could see his eyes; his eyes say it all," sighs Alfie.

He looks in my direction. "You wouldn't know 'bout things like that, recorded before you was even born," he says removing his shades and coming down to sit beside me. Afrika Bambaataa takes a stool on my other side, but remains mute while Brown is speaking. Although it was his idea to approach Brown to make "Unity" and he's followed him for years, it soon becomes clear that there are several issues on which Bam is prepared to be more forthright than The Godfather. His silence seems only to avoid contradiction and ensures the courtly respect flows smoothly.

In the past you've been critical of new funk groups. Why have you decided to work with Bambaataa?

No, I'm not critical. It's an extension of what we've done and it's another way to get to it. I'm never critical of no one.

"He's got a reputation for helping the young, and that's what I'm about also": Brown on Bambaataa

One thing we are critical of, Bambaataa and myself, is people killing each other. Now you live as long as you can and die when you can't help it, but we don't want you to plan nobody's death.

But you must have had offers from people before?
Yeah, I have; I won't call their names, they're good people, good faith. I think one of the Rolling Stones wants to do an album with me now, Nona Hendryx also. They want me to work with Aretha, but I choose Bambaataa. When I first talked to him, I knew it was what I wanted to be involved in. He's about people looking out for the underdog and looking out for the small man. That's what I get from him, that's what he told me; anything else he's thinking I don't know about, but that's what he told me. He's got a reputation for helping the young, and that's what I'm about also.

> "Louis Jordan influenced me. It was the show as well as the music"

The sound of inner-city hip hop is an extension of the sound of American geography. When you began making music, the various regions had clearly defined "sounds". Were you conscious of wanting to integrate all these elements?
It's like travelling – some takes the autobahn, some takes the service road, some take a train, some take a plane. Everybody's going the same place – survival. [*Baffled, I repeat the question.*] No, I wasn't. I was conscious about eating and sleeping. I wanted to live. All that came after. But once you get what you want you shouldn't be so hung up on yourself that you won't help other people. That's why I love him, because he's concerned about people other than himself.

Weren't you influenced by people? I hear you like the blues singer Little Willie John?
No, he didn't influence me. I like some of the things he was doing but he didn't influence me. Louis Jordan influenced me, *Lew-iss* Jordan. It was the show as well as the music – very vibrant, very entertaining.

Your show was very stylised – how did you go about putting it together?
I think organisation is the key to everything. Organise – that's what Bambaataa's talking about. Organise people's minds toward peace. Organisation. What's wrong with the entertainers today is that they walk on stage and they're not organised, then they ask the audience which one shall we play. We know which one we're going to play when we get up there. Entertainment, that's what its about – E-N-T-E-R-T-A-I-N-M-E-N-T, entertainment. »

JOE STEVENS

Was it important that your show was very rootsy; it came from local communities and ordinary folks could relate to it?
I don't understand your terms of words, so I'm not going to agree with you.

AFTER A WHILE it becomes clear that James Brown isn't so much interested in answering questions as using the spaces in the conversation as an opportunity to propagate his flaccid, ecumenical cliches. He tells me later that I'm too young, got no wisdom, that I'm dragging down the horizons of the interview. Well, excuse me.

I'm not quite used to adjusting to the neo-mystical rarefied verse required by Ye Gods of entertainment. Oh sure, we could get into one of those dopey religious flip-top dialogues, but it would get us nowhere fast. This is JAMES BROWN forgodsakes, a real bleeding hero. I want to grapple with the reality of the man who had me motivated and fortified by his music for as long as I remember. A man whose music has travelled further and stayed sharper than anyone involved in the (r)evolution of modern music, whose gut-bottom pained shriek on "Cold Sweat", "Please Please Please", "Bring It On" (fill in your favourite) is the epitome of soul music's sonic powerdrive. A man whose esteem seems to diminish every time he opens his mouth to do anything other than use The Steinway. I decide I might have more success with a reverential pitch.

You went through a lot of hard times touring the South, recording great music that never charted, getting ripped off. Did you always feel that you'd be popular?
I thought I would get to the top. I knew I had something to offer and that I was as good as any man that wanted to do something and a whole lot better than those that didn't want to do nothing. Heh heh heh. You understand?

You became a real hero to many, like young Bam here. Was that the intention?
I must have done something he liked. I hope I became a hero to him. I hope I became a hero to his family and that he's a hero to me. The intention was to be a hero, to make everyone like me. In the beginning it was for me, then I got mine and I started to think of other people. Any man who doesn't think of himself first is not very intelligent. When you eat food, do you eat for yourself or someone else? I rest my case.

You developed at the same time as Elvis Presley...
I didn't develop anything Elvis did. I was singing before I met Elvis. We wasn't allowed to play together during that time, there was a separation thing called prejudice. Elvis and I got together when we weren't working; we were good friends, we was religious brothers. Both sung gospel.

Were you to black folks what Elvis was to white folks?
We was equivalent to people, but the system wouldn't allow us to be together – not as white and black people. But we had to say what we said during those times, even though people don't really have a colour. But since they separated us, we dealt with what we had. But, by the same token, when he'd get off work, Elvis would be peeping in the window watching BB King and T Bone Walker like I used to watch Tommy Dorsey, Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra.

You met them as well?
Yeah, I met Sinatra. Sinatra's a very good friend of mine. I like a lot of things he did. I like the way he stood up for himself and defended himself when he was publicly attacked.

Would you like to have recorded with Elvis?
I think it would have made a good record – me doing what I felt and Elvis doing what he felt. I think it would have been good for humanity – like Bambaataa and me together is good for humanity. I'd love to record with Streisand, that would definitely be good for humanity and for artistic merit. I would still like to record with Sinatra and hopefully, I wish, he would like to record with me, because I think we could bring a lot of things together.

September 10, 1984: Brown on stage at the First Avenue nightclub in Minneapolis, Minnesota

JIM STEINFELDT / GETTY

"The intention was to be a hero, to make everyone like me"

You created a great showman that you seem to have to be 24 hours a day – is that easy to live with?
James Brown is forever because he do as God tells him to. Yes it's great to live with, all you got to do is think of the time before. To be so important is easy to live with.

Does the world need heroes today?
Sure, everybody needs heroes. Heroes are role models.

Are the heroes of today the sort the world needs?
The world needs what it has; the world don't produce nothing it don't need.

It produces famines, nuclear waste, wars.
Wars? I guess it needs wars. Wars is a way of debating. Killing – they don't need that. But they have wars, the whole of the Olympics is war. A war of art. Heh heh heh.

> "I'm not going to get off on black and white. Don't ask me"

Have you seen The Jacksons' show?
I didn't get a chance, though I was invited there. But Michael is doing very good and well enough without me not to bother seeing him. I don't want to distract attention away from him. Kids need to look at Michael, not me. We got Michael going, now we got to work on Prince and Bambaataa.

Jackson regularly checks you as a major influence, but the elements of sexual ambiguity and childlike wonderment in his act seem at odds with the masculine tradition that you celebrated. Would you agree with black Muslims who've said his image is "sissified"?
I haven't anything to do with that. I'm not here to talk about that. I think you've run out of questions, haven't you? Don't get fresh when you come back to me. I don't want to talk about other people. Don't ask me those sort of questions. I'm here to talk about this thing (*points at a copy of "Unity"*). You talk to Bambaataa now.

WHOOPS, THINK I just blew the James Brown story. The great man ups and walks off to complain to Mister Stallings. As I shoot the breeze with Bambaataa – a sweet guy with his own story to tell – I can hear Willie Glenn shouting, "Yeah, you right, you right, you damn right."

Bambaataa had met James Brown several times in the '60s and '70s when he came up to the Bronx, sometimes making an appearance at one of the special annual Brown tribute nights that Bam DJ'd. Just as James Brown stopped a race riot by going on 24-hour TV in the late '60s, so when the calm of his club was one night disturbed by a shooting incident outside, Bambaataa quelled the crowd by playing nonstop JB.

The Godfather recorded what is probably the first rap record – "America Is My Home" – and later, when the '70s scene took off, made one of his greatest records in years with "Rapp Payback" – semi-taunt, semi-tribute to the youngbloods. While he'd obviously been keeping tabs on the New York scene – he'd been snapped hanging out with Kurtis Blow during the early days of The Roxy – it wasn't until the young man who he remembered from way back (Brown's photographic memory is legendary) made him an offer that he decided to join forces.

But it's not all that Bambaataa's been involved with or plans to be involved with. A list of his ventures criss-cross the cornucopia of modern music. Firstly he has his own groups on a variety of labels – Shango, Soul Sonic Force, Time Zone – and then the people who are interested in using his beat advisory service – John Lydon, Thomas Dolby, George Clinton, German rapper Falco, Yellowman, Nona Hendryx.

He hasn't actually met Lydon, but in preparation he was watching all available videos of the PiL lynchman and reading as much as he could about him. Whatever love he once had for Lydon's former manager was washed away by McLaren's comments on a recent hip-hop documentary.

"Anybody asks me about Malcolm and I always start talking about Malcolm X. McLaren is a liar. He met me in a housing project in South East Bronx – it wasn't burnt out or looking raggedy or nothing. They show the same piece of the Bronx all the time in the movies and on the box, but it's only a small part of it that is like that."

For a guy so young and so much in demand, Bambaataa seems in control and not afraid to let his tongue loose on issues like South Africa, when these days The Godfather would rather keep schtum. I decide to go for broke with Brown and ignore the guidelines.

You've met nearly every president since Kennedy – what effect did that have on you?
There are things I'd like to do and I see things they're fighting and help to make their life easier. Every president wants to do good, see. Everyone want to do what the other one's doing, they all want to do good. They just have a different way of going about it. I met Johnson, Vice President Humphrey, Mr Nixon, President Carter and Mr Reagan. Mr Nixon is my number-one president because he was the president, the boss. Most people become president and listen to someone else, but he was the president in his head and Mr Reagan is president in the same way.

The relationship we have with China is only because Mr Nixon knew what he was talking about with Watergate. If he'd have waited to see what they were doing then we'd have had to forget about China and the whole new frontier for communications, the relationship and brotherhood. He done the right thing.

The person that is the president of the United States is the president of the world, because the United States sets all the presidents up like that whether they like it or not. So you should have your act together if you want to be president of the United States.

[I didn't need to ask this man if he was voting for Jesse Jackson.] A few years ago you played in San Quentin prison and became quite emotional at the sight of a prison filled with black men. You said nothing had changed for black people in this country. Is it still the same?
I'm not going to get off on black and white. Don't ask me about that. Things have changed in America for everybody. You can do what you want to do; most people don't want to do anything. I don't want nobody to give me no welfare. Don't want no welfare cheque, that stagnates me.

What happened to the James Brown of militant pride, the James Brown who wasn't afraid to point fingers and diagnose ills?
When we recorded "Say It Loud I'm Black And I'm Proud" it was necessary to get people to come forward, but to me it was a comedown. I didn't want to have to record that, because it separates them. I had to separate them and give them an identity at one point and join them together later. That's why "Unity" is so important.

So was "Sex Machine" a reaction against being politically pigeonholed?
"Sex Machine" had nothing to do with it, it has many meanings. There is sex in everything, sex is understanding, also sex is something else. Come here and I'll show you how to write "Sex Machine".

WE GATHER ROUND the great sage as he prepares to go through one of his weird little games. Doubtless Willie will be humbled with wonderment at the end of it all. On a sheet of paper Brown writes "Sex Machine".

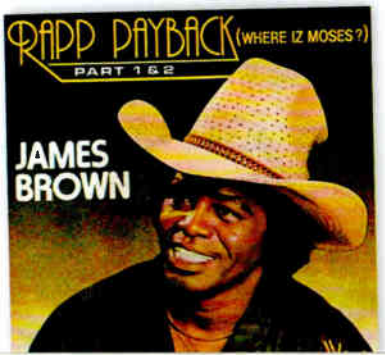
"That to you means getting it off, making love. But have you ever listened to the message on 'Sex Machine'?"

Well, I've always thought it was about more – motivation, excellence, disciplined pleasure.

"That's right. Now what is it?" (*He makes the 'S' into a dollar sign.*)

"Money," says the girl from Tommy Boy.

"That's right. You know I do a little bit where I slide across the stage. That's like a typewriter, the return. I go back and forth. Change things. And I start in lots of different places, so 'Sex Machine' becomes the musical cleft (*draws another 'S' and alters it accordingly*). It can also be two people making love. That same 'S'." »



"How old are you? I can tell by your questions that you're very young": Brown with indefatigable *NME* inquisitor Gavin Martin in New York, summer 1984

So you thought about all those things when you were writing the song, did you?
No, God gave me an idea and he knew I'd develop all those thoughts from that one thing.

I ASK WHY HE recorded so many of his old songs again in the late '70s, and he says, "I just do as God tells me."

And what of his collaboration with Sly and Robbie?

"I wanted to go in one direction and they wanted to go in another. But he and I did something together because we went in the same direction. Heh heh heh. Ain't that funny, Bam? Hehh heh heh heh, that's really funny…

"I ain't metcher mam yet, Bam, got to meet your mam."

"That'll be a trip for her," says Bambaataa.

"It'll be a trip for me, too, to see where a fine young man like you come from. You come from a special breed of people to go through all the things you went through and still draw a happy medium. But you're still into that black thing real strong, aren't you, Bam?"

"I check for all world things. I'm looking out for everybody. But especially for them that are where I come from."

"But you got to take everything in your stride. You'll see a lot of things but you don't want to limit your conversation when you say you're black, white, German or Jewish; you're going to turn off other nationalities and limit it. Your rap will begin to change and modify itself, but you'll still be talking about the same things.

"I'm not telling you what to say, but I will give you both points of view and let you make your own decision, because you're going to make both decisions later anyway. You make one decision now, what's known as a right decision; later on you'll make a left decision. Later on you'll make one that's right down the middle. That will come from experience, nobody can teach you that."

JOE STEVENS

As Joe [Stevens, photographer] decides to take some snaps, Brown pushes away the packet of Kool cigarettes resting on the table beside him.

"One thing, we don't want pictures with cigarettes in them."

Still, throughout the course of the day he regularly filches a few fags from Alfie's packet. Even soul giants have their vices, I guess. He also tells Bambaataa to hide his wallet: "You don't want to associate yourself with money."

Later the next day I see him talking to Tommy Boy label boss and "Unity" executive producer Tom Silverman. They are comparing hands and Silverman comments on Brown's lack of jewellery. "That's good, that's right," says JB. "We don't want to alienate the poor, don't want to show our wealth."

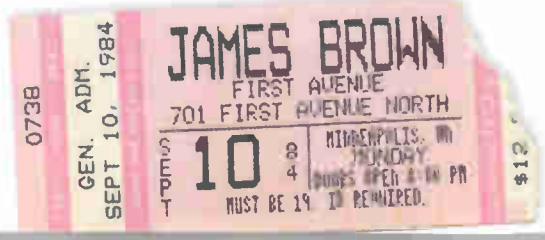
One thing that has always come through in the mercurial fuse of Brown's music is the way he combines gospel traditions and spiritual thoughts with the most visceral, the dirtiest of desires. Unhindered by contradiction and compromise, his swagger and buzz phrases and his finger-popping funk throttle were given full reign and became multi-applicable – good for the body and a tonic to the spirit.

> "One thing – we don't want pictures with cigarettes in them"

Never was he haunted by the crisis of conscience that drew Little Richard and Al Green to the path of preachin' purity, nor has he been shadowed with the dark foreboding that hangs over the legacy of gospel brothers Sam Cooke and Marvin Gaye.

Brown points at Alfie, "She's first in my life. Well, God is first in my life, but in worldly things she's first in my life. God gave me a message for all my songs. God found out man was lonely so he gave him a woman.

"How old are you? I can tell by your questions that you're very young. If you were five years older you'd ask different questions, young Gavin. You'll do nothing before your time, heh heh heh."



WITH THE PHOTO session finished, the entire Brown posse retire to the dining room for lunch. The girl from Tommy Boy asks me if I've got enough and I give her a befuddled look. She nods knowingly and agrees to Stevens' suggestion that we accompany them to their next assignment with MTV a few blocks across town. There he and Bambaataa will be interviewed and the video for "Unity" will be previewed.

When Brown strides purposefully through the hotel lobby or across New York streets, many elbows are nudged, eyebrows raised and tracks stopped in. Young guys have that quizzical "Is it really him?" look; older folks holler and cheer, "JB, mah main man!" "Whoo, Godfather," yells a construction worker atop several stories of scaffolding.

In the green room at MTV, Alfie preens Brown for his appearance – fixing his shirt collar, removing dust flecks from the back of his jacket and flicking his hair curls into perfect shape. James and Willie decide to try their hands at the pool table in the middle of the room. "Well I dunno, I used to be pretty good but I ain't shot for some time," says Willie.

"Weren' I bad, Willie, weren' I bad?" says Brown.

"You sure was bad, James. You sure was," says Willie.

"When James and me get together we're the baddest team there is. Ain't that right, baby?" says Alfie on the sidelines.

"That's right, baby, that's right," says James.

James gets beaten on the game of nine ball and as Willie walks away he playfully mutters under his breath, "Ya jive-ass mutha-fuggin' nigger." Bambaataa had disappeared into the kitchen on arrival but as they'd rode the short distance from the hotel to the TV station Brown had continued to give him advice on presentation.

"You speak kind of low, Bam, I don't want to undercut you. When you say the words 'LOVE', 'PEACE' and 'UNITY', say them loud like a DJ."

But just before they are due to make their appearance, there's a hitch which is finally resolved when MTV agree to draw up a specially worded contract. James objects to the wording that says MTV permits him to appear on their channel. "I'm not signing that – I didn't ask to be on this show. There might be some kids begging to go on the show, but it's not me, not James Brown. Rick James may have begged to go on it, but where is he now? If I go on, their ratings go up and they get millions of viewers. I'm doing them a favour..."

Everything is eventually completed to everyone's satisfaction. "I told you, things can't go wrong with Alfie there. Everything goes well when she's around," confides James. He helps his wife into the van, pushing her expansive rump. "Always let me help you, honey. Because you always help me," he coos.

As the van makes its way back to the hotel he slaps his palm on the upholstery in time to the funky backbeat provided by the radio. Although he never rolls up his trousers to reveal the scars and smashes caused by 20 years of onstage knee drops, up close you can see his marked, flattened knuckles bear the scars of his previous career.

"I was a prizefighter, y'know, southpaw. At first I fought in the streets, then I was a professional. Fought three fights professionally, won them all, 138 pounds I was then. They wanted to take me around the country, but I couldn't go because in those days I was a juvenile delinquent.

"Me and Sugar Ray Robinson sparred together once. We knocked each other down at exactly the same time. Ain't that something? Have you ever been knocked down? It's like you've stumbled over a box or something. Everything seems to go slow and you're looking for something that you tripped over but you just keep falling."

Unlike some, however, James Brown didn't keep falling, rising from the lowliest of stations (born into Southern poverty and racial hatred, a jailbird by the age of 16) to become the massive alter ego he made for himself. Along the way he forged R'n'B, gospel and self-respect into S-O-U-L, became a symbol of pride and resilience, drilled some of tightest, most stunning groups ever recorded, and produced a tornado of a live show, the sheer blinding intensity of which will probably never be equalled.

Now the trajectory of the man who gave his all to showbusiness in a search for his place in America is complete. He may have had to prune down his massive business empire when the income tax man arrived in the mid-'70s – the chauffeurs, the valets, the hairdressers, the radio stations and the mansions – but now he's back on top, on parade.

He hobnobs with presidents, kids who weren't around to hear his golden era catch up with an exhaustive series of compilations, and a legion of performers – black and white – bear witness to his influence. The recognition and acceptance he has lusted after is now his and he can look over the New York skyline and far beyond and say, truly, "James Brown is forever."

This picture of a soul survivor, a soul champion, is brilliantly etched by Gerri Hirshey in her magnificent book *Nowhere To Run*. But there are those who would say that, to get where he is, James has had to turn his head round so many times that he's now a mass of contradictions, that the monolith of the American industry and the political straightjacket it imposes on all its lynchpins has eaten away at the resonance and strength of his deepest, most adamant declarations. And they've got a point, too.

> "At first I fought on the streets, then I was a professional"

On the final day of the New Music Seminar, James Brown dominates the panel which includes Peter Wolf, Bambaataa, George Clinton, a coquettish Madonna and a starstruck Lou Reed. The whole seminar has been hallmarked by the serious, serving attitude of the industry, and as a zealous image protector, James Brown is not about to upset the trend.

Brown performs well in front of a crowd even though most of what he says is backslapping industry twaddle. However, while outlining his plans to peg prices on his forthcoming tour, he defends The Jacksons' ticket fiasco. "Bullshit," cries a voice from the audience.

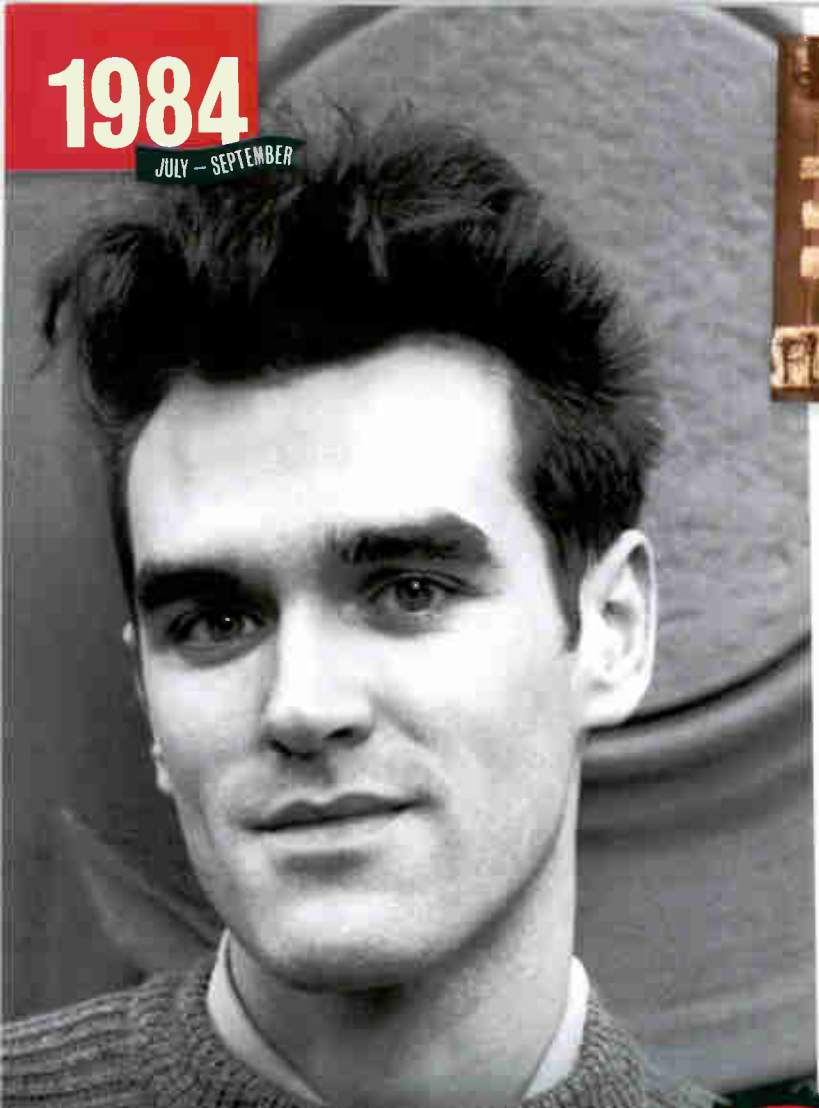
It was a charge that could quite easily have been applied to an earlier comment when he told the audience he played to 1.3 million people in France. "That's more people than live in Atlanta, Georgia," he enthused. Actually, the population of Atlanta is nearly double that figure. Some people don't know where to quell their egomania.

Fielding a question about voting preference in the forthcoming US election – which, predictably, no one wanted to answer – the panel chairman Howie Montaug said he would certainly not be voting for Reagan. Brown interjected, saying if that was the case then he would be voting for him.

Tom Silverman (a seminar organiser as well as Tommy Boy chief – a fact that led several to believe the whole seminar had been designed around an elaborate puff for "Unity", and certainly James Brown, the total showman, sees to it that the single is publicised at every available turn) reportedly later chided Montaug for allowing the question to be posed.

Too confusing, too off-putting when he gets on his reactionary high horse (sure, JB says he's against nuclear war, but so does Reagan), but what he does best, what everyone wants to see, is James Brown, *the* JAMES BROWN. Inevitably they get their chance at the close. Someone asks for a JB scream and he obliges. Then his old pal George Clinton goads, "Do the splits, James. Do the splits as well." Sure enough, he gets on the podium and he does a mean little shuffle and two full-length splits. The crowd rise in thunderous applause – all those that came to see James Brown be the guv'nor, The Godfather, are satisfied.

And all those who expected him to be less cosy, more challenging? Well, maybe we shouldn't expect so much from someone who's found a comfortable place at the core of the American dream. *Gavin Martin* •



"The future looks ironed"

MM AUG 4 Morrissey reviews the week's 45s.

SINGLES REVIEW 1984

SINGLES

The Woodentops Plenty FOOD

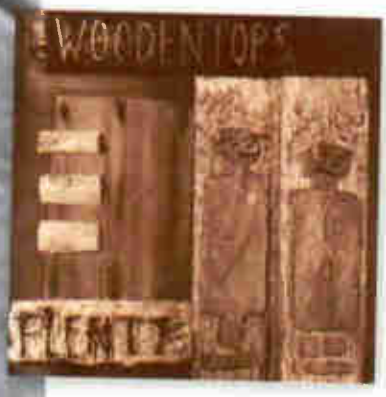
Anyone sane living in this world will realise on hearing "Plenty" that The Woodentops bring with them a new age of enlightenment. This, their prize exhibit, is a record that you want to cuddle and keep forever. A proud, dramatic, earthy romp, it is a personable celebration amid the pallid hoo-ha of false pop-ness. The Woodentops, with Easterhouse, have the insight that all young groups ache for, a sense of knowing that a record should never be made unless it is a physical necessity on behalf of the artist. Here, a voice of fine pitch sails with explosive honesty. Similarly, the B-side stands as an unqualified triumph. Please God, make this a hit.

Flying Lizards Sex Machine STATIK

Heaving asthmatically in the name of high sexuality, Sally Lizard emerges as bloodless as a prune. With Michael Lizard, she recounts James Brown's grand romanceless seduction with churchlike sobriety. The pace is snail-slow, the passion almost programmed, and the good-fellow jollity is fun in much the same way that death by leprosy is fun.

Howard Jones Like To Get To Know You Well WEA

Pop rajah Howard concretely illustrates how a finely crafted "pop" record can almost hint at human cruelty. It is by sheer miscalculation of nature that toothsome Howard finds himself making records. Howard's success could last forever, but his songs will never be mistaken for serious art. On this single, one can listen to it for hours and hear nothing, which must be a craft in itself. In a world of "in-ness" and "out-ness", Howard stands as an identification figure for all prepubescent horseback riders. On the sleeve of this record, he cuts a stunningly forgettable figure in he-man trench coat, and the future looks ironed. To predict that this will not be a hit seems wishful. In all truth, Howard is a sweet man. But a steady diet of sweets sickens.



National Pastime No Goodbyes SPELLBOUND

Musically derailed, National Pastime spur on, by nature of their boyish charm, to become household irritants. One does not wish to be deliberately cruel to quite obviously dedicated musicians, but in the interest of general public health, cruelty becomes necessary. For all the sizzlingly dull "romance", the urgings sound flattened, the cravings sound embalmed. National Pastime are four boys for whom a well-buttered scone would satisfy all fleshly cravings.

Venus In Furs Extended Play MOVEMENT

Grantedly grim, VIF etch on their run-off "Next stop Auschwitz", which sounds moderately self-deprecating. Times is the little coddled treasure controlling this project. Ready instead of rough, his voice is not dissimilar to Bid of the Monochrome Set.

"Momento Mori" is Brighton's "The Gift", and it's all surely the beginning of a string of vital discs.

Virgin Dance The Dream Is Over (We Can Make It) SPARTAN

Typically Now, VD are, you know, Gothic and Mysterious. As the record hits the turntable, the mystique is magically exhausted. Edwin Hind is a modern spiritual son, and the mechanics of sex are his lyrical concern. Effortlessly handsome, Edwin's machismo crucifixion glamour pose is the dream realised; curious how the other four members are almost entirely blacked out by an obviously sensible sleeve artist, for fear that Tarzan be upstaged. But alas, one has forgotten the song before the record ends.

Suzi Quatro I Go Wild RAK

At your age? I sincerely doubt it. On this sleeve, bearing a bloodcurdling resemblance to the Witch Of Capri, the seemingly deathless Suzi revs up yet again with a musical plot which remains unaltered since 1973. "I'm an alley cat," she growls, sentiments which, a decade ago, were mildly forgivable, but which, in 1984, seem almost unhealthy. Quatro is worthless because of her absolute inability to convey any emotion other than pre-teen hysteria. A "Rocker" she claims, and a "Rocker" she is. Rocking, in fact, into oblivion.

Troy Tate Thomas SIRE

The numerous associations of Troy Tate must now be put firmly behind him. This is the best record he has ever appeared on. Lyrically, "Thomas" is brave because it bulldozes over delicate ice. Male friendships viewed sensitively risks ridicule, and Troy survives through deep sincerity. Withholding nothing, the overstretched guitars lead poignantly to a fatal gunshot and the death of Thomas. This record should be a sizeable hit, should justice prevail. However, we know that it very rarely does.

Gina X Drive My Car STATIK

Frightfully modern rehash of Beatles cutie which makes no immediate sense. Gina looks smug on the sleeve, for reasons

KIRSTIN RODGERS / GETTY

that can only be other than musical. Sexy, yes, stylish, yes, but also a little silly.

The Go-Betweens
Part Company SIRE

It is a mad, indescribable joy to listen to words with depth, scope and thought. The Go-Betweens' mood here is tremendously sad, and it is their best record. Produced carefully by John Brand, The Go-Betweens have waited some considerable time for national acclaim. Their time has come. Listen and learn.

Kid Creole & The Coconuts
Don't Take My Coconuts

ISLAND

When you've been up, the only way is down, and Kid Creole must concede defeat gracefully. The undistinguished ho-hum hokum of "Coconuts" has plots of old diluted, soiling the always pleasant memory of their earlier hits. But their hasty eclipse becomes easily understood. The locker-room giggles, the ragbag of rhumba and wares of old are never re-peddled. The punchline never arrives, and Kid Creole stands humourless like a Halloween trickster in mid-April.

The March Violets
Walk Into The Sun REBIRTH

Encased in adoring cover, the Violets march hard-faced and independent. Like such as Killing Joke, their spirit and guts as people is often more alluring and appealing than anything they put on vinyl.

Mark King
Chocks Away POLYDOR

Who, in an audience, could feel the remotest empathy with such sterile, clean, efficient, non-human music? Thankfully the unusable voice is not used persistently, and semi-disabled musical interludes could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be considered particularly vital. The lyric is impoverished.

The Adventures
Another Silent Day CHRYSALIS

Many major record companies have mastered the knack of presenting new groups in ways that make us believe that they are not, in fact, new. Without signalling revolution, The Adventures' disc looms in glamorous gatefold sleeve. I wanted to like this record, but I just couldn't. It does not have a paper label, which is a thing I like to rely upon as a matter of course. The Adventures are not even vaguely repellent (despite being on Chrysalis) and I wish them well.

East Of Java
Burning Sun RCA

Where well-coiffed hairdos tell the whole story. It would be criminally unfair to dismiss EOJ as a madly dated Japan, but this is how they plead to be recognised, which is no cardinal sin, but hardly enmeshed in tact or common sense. Their effort is brave, but clearly there isn't much to work with. They will spend all their RCA advance on a razzle-dazzle video, but that their record could never be construed as a gothic art is a fact clearer than day.

Diana Ross
Reach Out And Touch (Somebody's Hand)

TAMLA MOTOWN

Re-released old befuddled chestnut which sadly does not turn out to be a mirage. It was dull in 1970, and remains so. The warmth is paper-thin, the soulless moan is murderous. Eluding the grasp of time, "Reach Out" has deliberately phoney Diana emitting the chillingly flat, pale humanity for which she inexplicably achieved global fame. One can only pray loudly for its final deletion.

ALBUMS

Prince
Purple Rain

WARNER BROS

The problem with major-league soul is not a lack of "good" music. What has been lost is the ability, possibly the desire, to make records that relate to the aspirations and needs of community. In the past, Mayfield, Wonder and James Brown fulfilled a purpose by communicating on a social as well as an emotional level. Nowadays Michael Jackson and Prince set themselves in a select firmament and nurture the cult of celebrity for its own sake, lighting our lives with a blessed gift to entertain.

That's not to say their entertainment is not often brilliant and enthralling; to these ears "When Doves Cry" is One Of The Greatest Records Ever Made. So why, you might ask, should Prince, who's never set himself up as a sage or a conscience, be expected to be anything but the perfect composite of black superdude stars? No particular reason, except I find it unsatisfying that the Minneapolis wunderkind with looks, youth, talent and the world at this feet can find nothing more to sing about than himself and the many marvellous chicks that undoubtedly come his way.

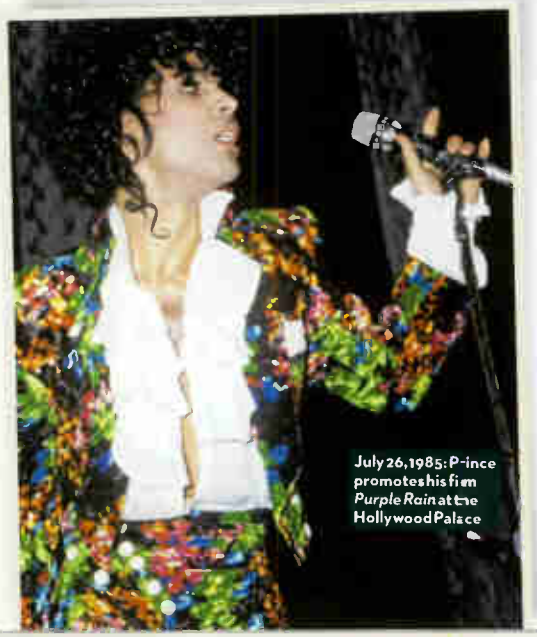
That said, I can't help but be washed away by the bulk of the goods on display on this, the fifth LP by the boy. The beauteous mix of guitar snarls, synth stabs and melodic elegy that make up "When Doves Cry" could have come from no one but him, and this uncanny knack for mix-matching dynamic raunch and epic balladry is borne out elsewhere on the record. Compared to the inferior tracks from *1999*, too many small ideas stretched into brittle dirges, these songs are full bodied and deep enough to show off the Prince's treasures to best advantage.

"Let's Go Crazy" opens with the self-deflating manifesto established on past outings: the end of the world is nigh, so liberate your underwear and your ass will follow. It's a hot and juicy all-out rocker with an automated Ant beat and it sets me in mind of a pre-conversion electro-age Little Richard, though it's obvious from the way he wields his guitar and cocks his titfer that Prince would rather be compared to Hendrix.

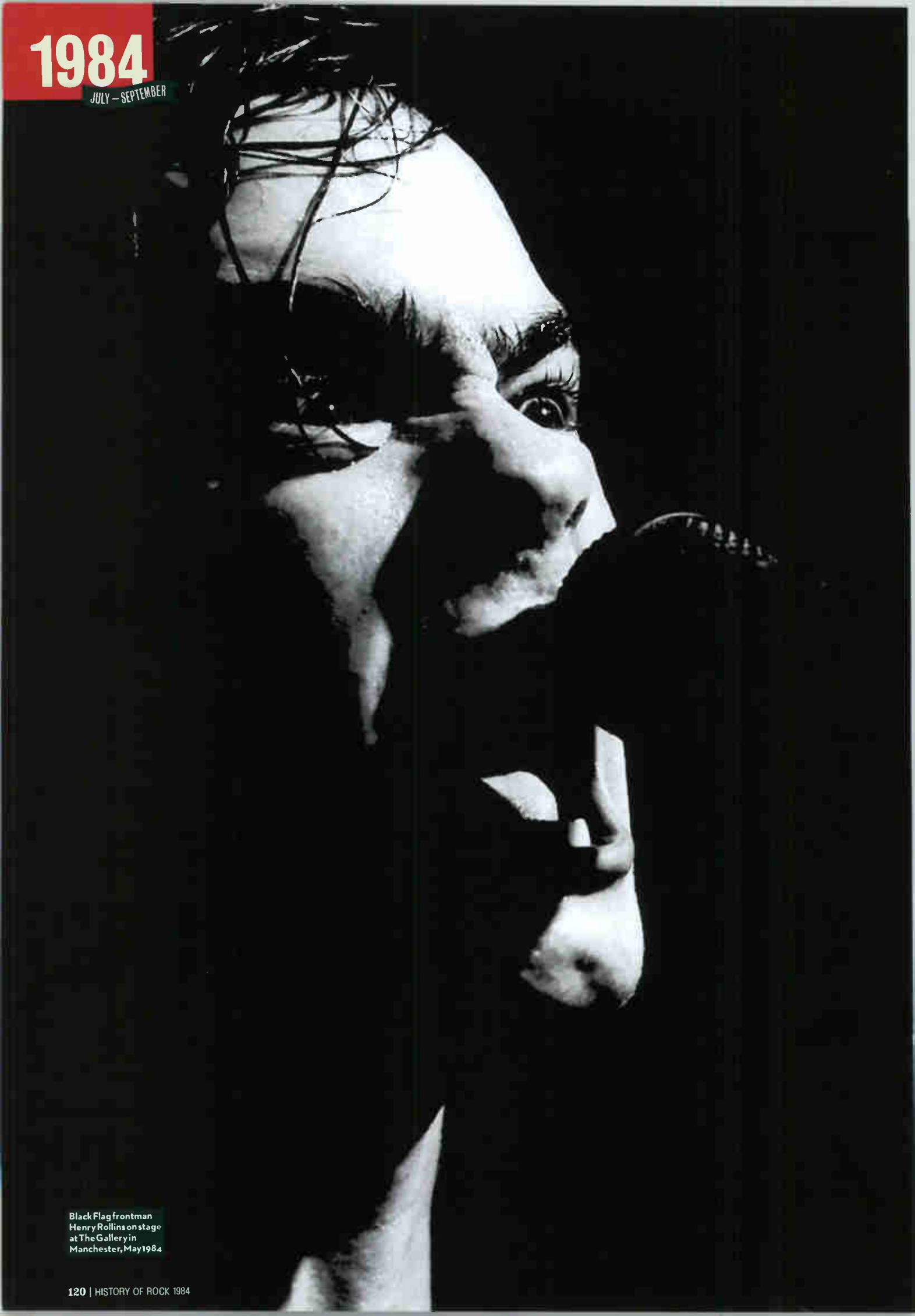
The main ode to sex here is "Darling Nikki", but its HM guitar grind and lyric to match isn't really a patch on the dual-edged popsical treats of *Dirty Mind*. Where this slutty sylph-like imp comes into his own is when he's easing romance out of bruised desire, when he takes his voice from empty sorrow to exquisite pain. When he pleas, cajoles and, yup, even climaxes on record he does it with a mix of the elemental and the technical (dig if you will the volcanic screech, the vocoded sexual nemesis of "Purple Rain").

The final crowning glory, the monstrous title track, is spoiled by overindulgence: it drags on just a little too long. It's some sort of proof that if you choose to merely use your fame to further your self-mythology (as one imagines the biopic to which this album provides the soundtrack will do) you risk not only being flippant and derisive of the possibilities your role could contain, but also watching the whole thing swallow you up.

Gavin Martin, NME, Aug 4


July 26, 1985: Prince promotes his film *Purple Rain* at the Hollywood Palace

SHERRY RAYN BARNETT / GETTY



Black Flag frontman Henry Rollins on stage at The Gallery in Manchester, May 1984

"I crave extremes"

Like Nick Cave and co, BLACK FLAG are part of a new underground, with violent, humorous interests. Only British apathy offends them. "There was this guy lying in a puddle of beer, giving me a V-sign," says singer Henry Rollins. "At least he could have tried to bite me."

— NME SEPTEMBER 15 —

RUN! THIS CAN'T be happening! The headlights of the car bearing down on Greg Ginn and Bill Stevenson capture two slack-jawed faces, stark with astonishment, with a hint of terror leaking into their eyes.

They've just come from another Black Flag practice session down in the Long Beach dump they call their base – but they could be heading for purgatory for real unless they move in the next sixth of a second.

Greg always said that anyone who thought LA was just palm trees and lard-assed, nut-brown businessmen in light suits and matching limos ought to pay a visit down here. He'd have liked to take one of those English skinheads who rant about middle-class, cosseted California, bring him out here and introduce him to one of the Samoans, the bald-headed, black-leather, barn-door size brigados, gang members. You get a lot less Samoans to the ton than you do British skinheads.

One of the missions of Black Flag is to lift the LA rock and draw attention to the scuttling creatures underneath – to give the lie to the well-groomed, preppy public face of California. But there are some extremes Greg Ginn will not go to to prove how much violence and psychosis seeps through the LA smogs, and landing up as a gangland casualty statistic is top of the list of things to be avoided. »

MARTIN O'NEILL / GETTY

But here he is, playing the role of the hunted in one of those cat-and-mouse, car-and-person, "let's see how much I can scare you before I smash the living daylights out of you" games. In the movies it's OK, but...

This is really happening!

As Greg and Bill wrench themselves over the wall, the car scrapes past, leaving a smear of black paint on the buff stone. Before he drops into the pile of garbage on the other side, Bill catches sight of a symbol on the back windscreen.

White supremacists! There's a slight and illogical relief in an attack with a motive around here. This is the land of the "serial killer" – lone prowlers gunning for anyone game for a slaughter – the city where overfilled mental hospitals spill registered psychopaths onto the streets.

All the same, it seems you just can't win in Long Beach. Black Flag have gained the respect of the Mexican and black gangs, which qualifies them as targets for cruising racists. It's insane, that's what it is. Insane.

ON THEIR LAST LP, *My War*, Black Flag freeze-framed a set of chilling scenarios from some steamy clime where tempers fray within a strand of snapping. It's something that comes to them naturally, as natural as the mordant humour that oozes through their every track. These are the images of modern America. Perhaps these days, when America is tranquilised up to the eyeballs in an attempt to escape back into the Dream, it has become a country so lacking in self-identity that it can only be seen by outsiders. After all, the best American film of the year, *Paris Texas*, was made by a German, Wim Wenders.

The aesthetic terrorists of the American hardcore are outsiders within. It's from Black Flag, Hüsker Dü, the Meat Puppets, the Swans and Sonic Youth that the most resonant images of Modern America have come. Where the American mainstream has plummeted further and further into the heart of the rock'n'roll cliche, the hardcore fringe have remained dedicatedly outside. "Swimming in the mainstream is such a lame dream," Black Flag announced to an internal cheer from this listener. From this sniping point they've emerged as satirists, ironists, parodists, musical journalists of the real.

"Art that doesn't tell you anything about reality isn't worth a lick of shit," rejoined another musical terrorist, Jim Foetus. Welcome to the reality show – in genuine sensurround scumerama!

Beginning with a cue more from the Ramones than from the English punk explosion, the American hardcore has a depth and diversity absent from the stereotyped idea of nonconformity foisted by the many English punk merchants. "Punk" means little to Black Flag – in fact on their visits to this country they revel in poking fun at the conformity of our Pavlov's punks.

"Back in '79 when punk first started, I was cool," says vocalist Henry Rollins to a barracking crowd of regulation spiky tops who balk at his shoulder-length hair. "I had a skinhead cut and everything!"

"1976!" bellow back the young punky types, who know their history well.

"'79 was the year," Rollins repeats in definite tones, and Pavlov's punks are confused. This band rings bells, but at the wrong time – should they slobber or not?

"Where's the punk rock?" demands a confused onlooker.

"Anarchy," bellows another carrot-topped Turvey punk.

"Anarchy?" asks Henry. "We play an instrumental where the whole band plays percussion and that's not anarchistic enough for you. Seems pretty fuckin' anarchistic to me."

Abuse they thrive on; the only thing they can't cope with is apathy.

"There was this guy in Retford," says Henry, "just lying on the floor in a puddle of beer, giving me a V-sign. I just thought, 'Bring on the 16-ton rake.' I mean at least he could have tried to bite me or something."

This is a form far removed from English punk. The germ that Black Flag implanted in the West Coast has since spread, with similar strains sprouting up in irritating rash-spots across the conformist face of America. The travel line could be plotted down from LA to Phoenix, Arizona, where the Meat Puppets produce a sound of scorched and screaming, sand-whipped guitar set against poetry of loneliness and fear. The shadow that flits across *Meat Puppets II* is a lone figure, walking single-minded and dedicated through the desert.

Then in the mid-American heartland there's Hüsker Dü, delivering with *Zen Arcade* an evocative selection of postcards from Nowheresville. And on to New York City, way over on the East Coast, where Black Flag's ethic of noise and dedication has been picked up by the anti-rockist, radical art fringe represented by the Swans and Sonic Youth, who have taken this sound to the limits of belligerence.

Meanwhile, more influences have been fed into Black Flag through Henry Rollins' connections with such literary-minded sick men as Nick Cave and his diarist Jim Foetus. It may seem, on these pages if nowhere else, that these names are splashed about with wilful abandon, but it would be foolish to ignore just how wide Chris Bohn's "nervous system" of Immaculate Consumptives is stretching its neurones.

What we have here is not a "scene" – one of those fragile little happenings centred in a single city, ready to be picked up and exploited, copied, destroyed – but a genuine system that spans a glorious arc across the atlas: LA, Phoenix, Minneapolis, New York, London, Zurich, Berlin and right across to Melbourne, Australia, starting point for The Birthday Party and Foetus. It's a system of resistance, actively mobilising against the forces of banality condemned in *NME*'s "War On Pop" issue.

Greg Ginn, founder member and only survivor of the first Black Flag, is a man of single-minded dedication, now eight years on from the beginning, when Black Flag began in isolation in the basement of Hermosa Beach Bath House. He's still pushing the unit through the boundaries of claustrophobia and further, on to new planes. It's a painful process, but the pain is all part of the discovery.

Eyes staring blankly forward, he drones monotonously.

"A lot of people... think we're just... the most... miserable... depressed people all the time. But to me it's the most fun... that I have."

Gaze still fixed at a point on the wall behind my left shoulder, he pauses long enough for me to contemplate whether his shirt had ever seen an iron, then continues. The eyes still show no signs of expression. "I really am partying. Even the slower songs are... well that's my kind of party song." He looks at me for the first time, the corners of his mouth turn down slowly and a Lurch-like chuckle creeps out. "Huh... Huh... Huh!" He laughs on the same single note as he speaks.

Rollins meanwhile hides behind his fringe, his mouth twitching every now and again as he squeezes the pool ball in his hand. He carries this around everywhere – he squeezes it and occasionally spins it on the table. This does not increase my feelings of comfort and security.

What, I begin, is your reaction to people who say that Black Flag are a band stuck in time?

Rollins slams the pool ball down on the table. "Who cares about other people," he says with dangerous emphasis, "Fuck what they think – let's hear what you think."

I think you use cliched forms, but with an awareness that they're cliches and with irony.

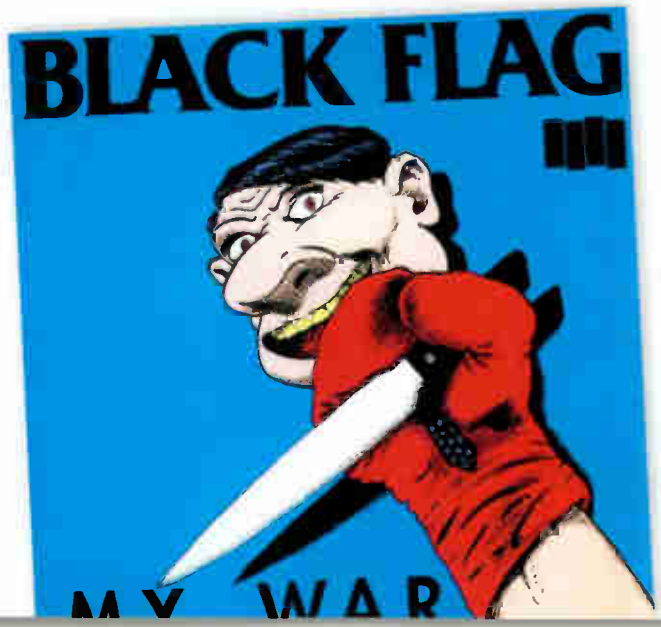
"You really think that?"

Yeah, I think that (foolish bravado, I reflect, as I watch the hand tighten its grip on the pool ball).

"Man," Rollins spits, "you must just have such contempt for what we do."

I'm watching the letters of the "SEARCH AND DESTROY" tattoo on his arm contract as his muscles flex, when Greg pipes up.

"I want the darkness, the horror, because I want everything"



May 5, 1984: Henry Rollins during a Black Flag concert at Perkins Park, Pasadena, California

"I don't think so. I think that's totally correct."

I breathe in for the first time in 30 seconds.

"I do like to use a lot of cliches," Greg continues, "and that's why I don't think that we're reactionary like a lot of the post-punk bands that we're put in a category with. They just want to react to everything and stay static themselves. But what we do is actually use the cliches in an active sense.

"It's really funny, though, when people take it literally. We get loads of idiots relating us to Led Zep – it's just reacting to the surface and totally missing the substance."

I hold discourse for some minutes on the wonders of the cliche, making many references to The Birthday Party. Rollins grins. "Oh yeah! You gotta have humour." Now that he's discovered that we share an obsession I begin to think he may not wish to disembowel me after the interview.

"Not everything is like a total joke. But if you sit there and are just totally serious about it all then it's just not believable. Everyone laughs at themselves – and everyone who doesn't has their head stuck way up their ass."

"The humour makes the heaviness so much more effective," adds Greg. "Before Henry joined, Black Flag were just so hilarious, but Henry's really heavy. The first time I saw him sing I just went blaaaaaaaaagh!"

Henry again: "When I write the stuff I don't think, 'Hey! Where'm I gonna put the little punch?', but you can usually get a bit of a chuckle out of it. I'm a pretty funny guy." He crushes the pool ball a little tighter and flings a manic look at the coatstand in the corner.

I profess a fondness of Henry's "Swinging Man". Now that pun on swinging as in swinging dude and swinging as in strung up by the neck, that's what I mean about inverting cliches.

By now Henry is beginning to look not only as if he may spare my life, but as if he may like me just a little bit. "Yeah, but the things that you find funny, like Nick [Cave] and me, they aren't the sort of things that people feel are exactly fair game for humour – people hanging themselves.

"But I really like those images – I just took this completely gross, pathetic image and made him into a really happening guy. I imagined him just hanging around there for three or four days, and he's just like bloated," the Rollins grin gets wider as he contemplates this image, "and yet all the women are checking him out!" he bursts into guffaws of laughter. "And he just takes his pick – he hasn't got a care in the world."

Is there anyone more gross than you, Henry?

"Yeah! That's what busts me up – things like U2 and the Thompson Twins, all that miserable, forced music; it just occurred to me the other day, those people are actually grosser than me, they're grosser than Henry Rollins. That really balls me out – I've got to figure out a way to out-gross them."

There is nothing grosser than overt cleanliness.

"I'm not into save-the-world bands," Rollins replies emphatically.

Some of us don't want to be saved, and you can put me down on the list. As far as I'm concerned, Bono Vox needn't have formed a band on my behalf; he could have found a like-minded sort and formed a brassiere.

All the same, there is an ethic to Black Flag, and a fairly puritan one at that. None of the band drink or smoke, any "waste of time" is frowned on. I mean, what is this? Some perverted breed of the American Dream?

"No," says Greg, "not at all. We just believe that if something isn't happening then you do it yourself, like we did with starting our own record label, which has since given an outlet to the Meat Puppets, Hüsker Dü and plenty of other people.

"Then people accuse us of preaching some kind of Americanism, but what they're ignoring is that America hasn't worked too well for us. We've been totally fucked over by the legal system, the illegal system, the police, just about every form of American control. So we're not preaching Americanism, but individualism, sure!"

BLACK FLAG'S INTENTION is to push everything to the edge, physically and mentally. Not that they subscribe to the manifesto of physical destruction. What they pursue is the extremes of emotion, the extremes of the capability of the human body – Rollins pours half a pint of sweat out of each sneaker at the end of a performance.

Their resources are implicitly directed against the stultifying force of Americanism. It's in this way that they identify with Charles Manson – as someone who sought to break the security of the tidy organisation of the rich side of LA society. (*By murdering people? – Ed.*)

In fact they now plan to release a Manson record on their SST label – an LP of acoustic guitar and voice recorded in prison.

"We're planning to pay the royalties real fast," quips Greg.

"All these people can wear all their little Charles Manson T-shirts and feel really bad," Henry glories, "but we're putting out the vinyl."

So why does Manson's perspective interest you?

"He's this five-foot-four guy, sitting up behind bars somewhere in California, and he terrifies people," says Henry.

But isn't murder just an easy way for a nonentity to attain a certain amount of notoriety?

"There was more to it than that, though," says Greg, "a lot of emotion to it. I'm not into killing people, but I can look at it as a phenomenon and find it interesting."

"A lot of what Black Flag is about," says Henry, "is looking at the evil that lies within human nature. You watch us play and you blow the whistle on yourself."

Of course that's something claimed by many – Theatre of Hate, for example, have made the laughable claim to penetrate human evil. With Black Flag, though, there is a tangible sense of danger – due mainly to Henry Rollins, who exerts such frantic energy in performance that the chuckle at Black Flag's obvious humour can get stuck in the throat.

"I do crave the very extreme of the extremes," he says with a dark calmness. "I've seen *Apocalypse Now* 11 times, and I actually get into depressions, thinking that what I do isn't shit, because I'm not in classified Cambodia, with chopped-off heads all over the place. I'm only pulling up to a club and playing.

"People ask if being on stage is hectic. I'm still alive, it can't be that hectic. I'm obsessed with that idea of the Heart Of Darkness. I feel if I could find the opening to that heart, I would throw myself in. I want the darkness, I want the horror, because I want everything. Not everything in the world, but every experience."

So how would you describe the Black Flag experience?

"It's like drinking black coffee all night," says drummer Stevenson.

"Someone said our new LP was an electrified aerobics record," rejoins bassist Kira.

"Yeah," says Rollins, "you get a Walkman, and you go into an all-girls school and get a big knife, and then you start doing your aerobics."

"Yeaaaaaaaagh!" Stevenson makes inhuman screaming noises while making stabbing motions.

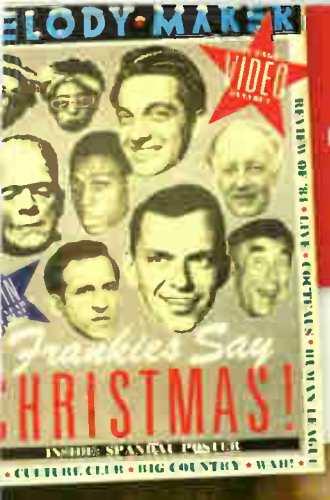
"Only kidding," Rollins emphasises.

But I was taking you seriously. I was just wondering where I could get a big knife from.

"Oh, we have a lot of them in the van," say Rollins helpfully. "Black Flag knives are going to be part of our merchandise – big 16-inch blades."

"No handle," adds Stevenson, "you have to hold the blade." *Don Watson* •

IRIS SCHNEIDER / GETTY



1984

OCTOBER – DECEMBER

U2, EURYTHMICS, ZZ TOP, ALISON MOYET, THE FALL AND MORE

November 25, 1984: some of the hastily corralled stars comprising Band Aid record the backing track for "Do They Know It's Christmas?" at Sarm West Studios, Notting Hill, London: (l-r) Johnnie Fingers (in hat), George Michael, Pete Briquette, Sara Dallin, Gary Kemp, Steve Norman, Keren Woodward, Nick Rhodes, Martyn Ware, Roger Taylor, Jody Watley, John Taylor, Paul Young, Glenn Gregory, Rick Parfitt, Tony Hadley

"Momentous"

MM DEC 1 Bob Geldof rallies stars for a good cause.

A **HOST OF POP** stars, including Wham!, Spandau Ballet, Duran Duran and U2, have joined forces to record one single – in a bid to raise money for Ethiopian famine victims. The single, described as "the most momentous recording in the history of vinyl", also features Sting, Phil Collins, Paul Young, Paul Weller, Heaven 17 and Bob Geldof – who organised the entire venture.

Others include Jon Moss of Culture Club, Kool & The Gang, Bananarama and Status Quo. The 38 stars are calling themselves Band Aid for the single, expected to be top of the charts by Christmas.

The record, "Do They Know It's Christmas?", is to be co-produced by Trevor Horn and Midge Ure, who wrote the track with Geldof. The B-side contains personal messages from David Bowie, Paul McCartney and Frankie Goes To Hollywood. There was a possibility, as the *MM* went to press, of Frankie joining all the other artists on the A-side, but no confirmation was available.

Everyone involved in the recording has given their services for free, from Virgin (who manufactured it for nothing) to the T-shirt manufacturers, and even motorcycle messengers who were hired in the course of the operation.

Big record-store chains like WH Smith, Boots, Woolworths, HMV, Virgin and Our Price have agreed to take no profit from sales: they're buying and selling the record for £1.35 including VAT.

All proceeds will go into a trust fund. And British Caledonian have already expressed interest in co-operating with the project to fly food supplies out to Ethiopia. Recording started on Sunday, and it's hoped that the single will be out within days.

STEVE HURRELL/GETTY

November 6, 1984: Mike Scott backstage as The Waterboys support U2 at Barrowlands, Glasgow

"A sense of adventure"

MM NOV 24 How Mike Scott came to make waves with The Waterboys.

MIKE SCOTT IS a man with a mission, though exactly what this mission is he finds it hard to say. At 25, he's a handsome fellow, though "striking" might be a better word. While people around him desperately cultivate the ragged, angular poise that associates itself with artistic endeavour, to Scott it comes as naturally as the fluency that permeates his work.

"Wild" is a word he says a lot with a faraway look in his eyes. His heroes are Bob Dylan, Patti Smith, Van Morrison and Bruce Springsteen. He is, to say the least, enamoured with the idea of himself on stage, singing songs of poignant, though often raunchy beauty, to a wildly receptive audience who'll go "wow" at every nuance of his lyrics. His songs are gift-wrapped and stamped "deep and meaningful", and sometimes they really are.

The Waterboys' music perpetuates the ethic of that era, and is tinged with just enough raggedy arrogance (the Patti Smith connection) to sway the modern arena. The band, very much a Mike Scott-controlled affair, play rock'n'roll, of that there's no doubt.

Somehow, though, they're misfits. They're not part of the "pomp 'n' glory" boys (U2, The Alarm, etc), but they've been shunted in that direction for the want of any other association. They don't really want to be mainstream either. Right now, they're supporting U2 in Glasgow. And, taking a pre-soundcheck breather, Mike Scott is kneading his hands over the failing heater in his dingy hotel room.

"I quite admire some of those bands," he drawls, "but I don't really think we're like them. We're much wilder, more open to improvisation, and the instruments we use are more diverse."

He rolls his eyes disarmingly.

"We have an unquenchable sense of adventure, and that to me is more important than anything else. I don't think about success and selling records. I just want to make the best music I can. I don't have goals or plan what I want to be doing in two years' time. I guess that will look pretty trite in print but that's how I feel."

He grew up in Ayr and Edinburgh, hated "the parochial, small-town attitudes", and in 1977 he started his own fanzine, interviewing The Clash and The Rich Kids and whoever else came to town. "I knew even before then that I wanted my own band, wanted to write and perform music, but up until then I didn't have the confidence to try."

His first band, Another Pretty Face, had two marginally successful singles but seemed plagued by contractual hassles and unsettling problems. Funhouse was the next incarnation, then after that The Red And The Black, all the time with Mike Scott trying to get the components just right. Disheartened by his failures, he went to New York to work with Lenny Kaye (from Patti Smith's band) but even that didn't live up to his expectations.

"After all the farting around I'd been doing it was like a miracle, being offered work with someone you've called a hero for so long. My manager had sent Lenny a tape and he liked it, so I flew over to New York. The whole thing was fucked up from the start. I wanted to work as a collaborative effort with both of us playing, but in the end it was with Lenny as producer and me as artist.

I really don't work well with producers, I don't need to be told things. I hear the final song in my own head, so I don't need the guidance. So here I was in a situation with this man I loved and I just couldn't accept the way we were working. It was great to meet him," Scott shrugs with angular grace, "but it's one of those things best forgotten."

Before I have time to comment on his naivety and stubborn idealism, he's whisked off to the soundcheck. Barrowlands is like a lurid aircraft hangar.

Police guard the stage door as if the PM herself were about to grace its portals. U2 are mobbed climbing into their coach to return to the comforts of the Holiday Inn. Mike Scott, meanwhile, is leading his band through the soundcheck as though their lives depended on it. Opening for U2 can't be fun at the best of times, but in Glasgow the pressure is twice as intense.

"I'm not as naive about the business as I pretend, but it can be useful to fake ignorance"

But, in the event, The Waterboys won their audience as cleverly as I've seen it done. Scott didn't flinch when they chanted for U2 in disturbing unison. "OK, they'll be on later," he laughed, crashing into the next intro. "So how about a little of this for starters?" In two minutes the crowd were stomping and clapping, swept unwillingly under Mike Scott's influence, liking his songs despite themselves.

"I suppose there's a lot of amateur psychology involved," says Scott afterwards. Upstairs U2 have taken the stage, floor and walls vibrate and the sound of a football terrace singalong mimics Bono's every utterance. Jim Kerr stands at the sound desk and mimes his own peculiar routine to the strains of this allied band. Both men look like marionettes conducting a lunatic chorus – a clear case of the blind leading the blind.

PAUL RIDER

"I respect their fervour," Scott hedges as I ask him what he thinks of U2's manipulation of the crowd's hysteria. "I think they have only the best of motives. But I think you're right to say that most of the crowd up there aren't really listening to the music, they're hearing it, and that's different. For myself I'd rather have 20 people who were really taking it in, than a whole stadium full of moronic lemmings."

When asked about his songs, he's less specific. Some of them are moralistic in a storytelling kind of way – like "Red Army Blues" and "Savage Earth Heart". They all harbour that stoic kind of wisdom that Dylan honed to an art form.

"What I'm interested in basically is life," Scott explains with a curious glance that asks how I hadn't picked this up for myself. "When I was a kid I was obsessed by the American Indians, by the power of their mythology, how their philosophy is based on principles of making the best from what you have.

"They prayed to The Great Spirit because they'd been given life and they wanted to make themselves worthy of that gift. I think that's the best any of us can try to achieve. CS Lewis once said that nothing is truly yours until you give it away, and I believe that as well."

If you're thinking that Mike Scott is a puritanical sourpuss you're wrong; he's just deeply entrenched in his own convictions. There's no po-faced proselytizing in the Waterboys camp, but Scott takes himself damnably seriously despite the horseplay. He writes songs about pagan mythology and the good within us all, but he always manages to avoid sounding twee.

"I'm not as naive about the business and related practicalities as I pretend," he grins, "but sometimes it's useful to fake ignorance; it's my way of dealing with the everyday problems. The problems we've had with interviewers before has been that we never put on an act. I can't sit here and reel off glib answers to queries about my songs. I can't present myself in any particular way, I just am.

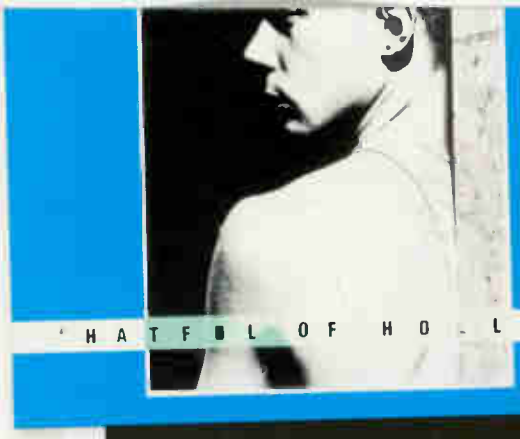
"I don't like talking about my lyrics, because they're such an intuitive thing. You either understand them or you don't. Like 'The Church Not Made With Hands' is about the religions that existed in this country before Christianity and how they didn't need four walls of a church to worship within.

"I suppose you could say that intuition and instinct are things that interest me a lot. I love watching the way humans behave."

He pauses. "I want The Waterboys to be the most talked about band of the '80s. And that's not as unrealistic as it sounds," he laughs, curling a lip over the jagged edges of his teeth.

Mike Scott is an impossible dreamer, but his heart's in the right place.

Helen Fitzgerald



PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A CONSUMER

FEARGAL SHARKEY

NME OCT 13 The Assembly man's true confessions.

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Various: Oscar Wilde – Impressions and Interviews
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Madness (especially their manager)

Tina Turner

"Imploring demands"

MM OCT 20 The Smiths release an "affordable" compilation LP.

THE SMITHS ARE about to release an "interim album" – a 16-track compilation that combines old, rare material with a selection of hit singles and extra tracks from 12-inch versions. The group, currently recording new songs that will emerge in some shape or form in February, release the album, *Hatful Of Hollow*, on November 2 on Rough Trade.

The old material has been chosen from Radio One sessions for the John Peel and David Jensen shows. And the remaining tracks comprise "Hand In Glove", "Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now" and 'William, It Was Really Nothing" as well as 'How Soon Is Now?" "Girl Afraid" and "Please Please Please Let Me Get What I Want"

The album, 55 minutes long and packaged in a gatefold sleeve, goes out in shops for no more than £3.99. Morrissey said this week: "A good portion of our mail contains imploring demands that we release versions of our songs that we recorded for Radio One sessions, and the band and I suddenly realised that we hadn't even proper-sounding tapes of them ourselves, except for a few dire bootlegs that we bought at our concerts.

"As far as we're concerned, those were the sessions that got us excited in the first place, and apparently, it was how a lot of other people discovered us also. We decided to include the extra tracks from our 12-inch singles for people who didn't have all of those and to make it completely affordable."

"A cruel system"

MM NOV 17 Fela Kuti jailed for five years.

NIGERIAN SINGER FELA Kuti has been sent to prison for five years on smuggling charges. He was last week found guilty of attempting to smuggle money worth £1,600 out of Nigeria en route to the States, where he was set to play concerts. He was arrested at customs on that occasion, and subsequently arrested again when he held a press conference at his home. That charge has since been dropped.

He appeared at the Foreign Exchange Anti-Sabotage Tribunal – a military court without any judge or jury – and was sentenced to five years in jail with a further term suspended. There's no right of appeal, only a "theoretical but unlikely possibility of remission".

A spokesman for Kuti said: "The authorities in Nigeria just wanted him away, and they've done it now. It's such a cruel system out there." Kuti was known for his attacks on the Nigerian authorities in interviews. His brother is holding a conference in London this week.

UNITED ARTISTS / GETTY

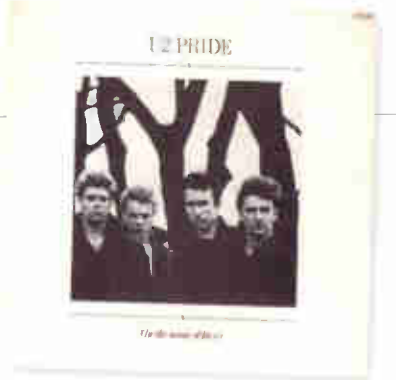
Fela Kuti jailed

November 14, 1984: Bono rallies the faithful at Wembley Arena during U2's year-long Unforgettable Fire Tour

DAVE HOGAN / GETTY

"We build the positive"

U2 are a big band of conscience, trying to do the right thing. Martin Luther King and gospel music their inspiration, Brian Eno is their guide. But will it all turn into empty gestures? "There is a danger in being a spokesman for your generation," says Bono, "if you have nothing to say other than 'help'."



NME OCTOBER 27

EARLIER THIS YEAR one of rock's newest messiahs, U2's Bono, appeared on stage alongside one of its oldest, Bob Dylan, at an outdoor Dublin festival in front of some 40,000 people. And Bono's influence over a new generation was officially confirmed at about the same time when Premier Garret FitzGerald invited him to join a committee set up to look at the problems of youth unemployment in Eire.

As their native city became a very bleak place with rampant heroin abuse, unemployment, even child prostitution, U2 had risen from their lowly garage band beginnings to become an international success – one of the country's leading exports, its four most celebrated ambassadors.

Even after travelling the time-honoured course of rock behemoths from the last decade – from being rock's bright new hopes to becoming its most prominent, bombastic banner-wavers – U2 signalled some sort of hope and optimism for a Dublin beleaguered by the new depression. In a city where the music scene stagnates around the tradition of Irish showbands, U2 had gone outside and reaped the fruits of world success and brought them home. They are now in a position where they can quietly begin to finance one or two community ventures.

"There are ways we can do things," explains guitarist The Edge, "but we must never be seen as charity, the noble boys doling out slops. Just keep our mouths shut and get things done."

Seen in the context of Dublin, even now the purpose, concern and compassion that shone in the early U2 remains still. Even now.

With the view of an outsider, as someone who was swept up on their first LP, *Boy*, what U2 have come to represent looks radically different. In the aftermath of punk, *Boy* with its furious mixture of implosion and celebration – the fears, aspirations and adrenalin of four young men stepping out into the world – seemed to herald a new rock dream and a swirl of possibilities.

They may have come from Dublin but in rock's tapestry U2 seemed to have no obvious home or destination. But all too soon their crucial desire to communicate and their relentless energy was directed in the wrong channels. While applauding their moral resilience and commitment, it was sadly predictable to see them embark on endless continental and American treks.

U2 developed along the traditional lines of all rock groups, and perhaps it was naive to expect otherwise. In an early *NME* review Paul Rambali had suggested, "They might lose their subtlety as they learn to use effect... might one day harden into a hollow, grandiose and massively successful style."

Indeed, consistent touring drew out the bombast, the anthemic rallying cries, the symbolic gestures. Their records had their moments – certainly the vibrant, pulsing "New Years's Day" stood up to the best moments of *Boy* – but in the main they lacked the sensibility to fulfil that debut's promise.

One Saturday night I turned on the box to see Bono clamber over a stack of speakers, then unfurl a large white flag in their "Under A Blood Red Sky" video. It was the final irony, this preposterous mishmash of grandeur and blaring bombast, these shape-throwing sessions weren't what I wanted to be associated with. Where once they had represented Life, Fire and Action, the new rock hopes were looking every bit as crude and vulgar as this generation's Led Zeppelin.

Now on their drive to big fame, we meet for the first time in three years, in an annexe of Island Records. They've just returned from Australia via Dublin, and in London they will rehearse at Brixton's Academy for the European leg of their world tour. Although they strike me as being just as affable as when we last met on their first British tour, travelling across Scotland in a mini van, they hold a certain wariness towards interviews. They aren't as keen to be drawn on points of strategy and idealism as before, preferring to let the music speak for itself.

That said, Bono is a gem – immediately exuding the same natural ebullience as on our last encounter. Guitarist The Edge is the calming influence, a rational counterbalance to Bono's sometimes exasperated passion, and at the end of the interview he voices concern that we've concentrated too much on topics other than what really matters – the music itself. Adam Clayton, with his English tones and scholarly disposition, can come over as surly and cynical, the guy most likely to pick holes in my questions. Drummer Larry Mullen, the group's youngest member, is absent as he's decided he's sick of the whole interview process.

With their massive world tour, "Pride" their first Top Five British single and their latest LP *The Unforgettable Fire*, this year U2 are perched on the edge of mega success. They keep the actual figures under wraps, but suffice to say the amount of money they grossed last year made sense of the slim returns of their first three years. While no one dares whisper it, it seems their plans to make it big, first by playing America's smaller Midwest venues and gradually easing into the large festivals and stadiums, has been quite carefully orchestrated by manager Paul McGuinness and their record company.

> "With Eno we rediscovered the spirit of our music, a confidence"

But it is this endless slog of touring that I feel has drained U2's vigour, a misplaced trust in what it can achieve for the group's music. At this suggestion, Bono's voice cracks into gear.

"We all left school completely uneducated; touring has been our way of learning. It upsets me when I see U2 portrayed in the press as touring, the pressure, the penance. I enjoy looking out of the coach and seeing Denver, Colorado, or the run from Edinburgh to Glasgow. I mean, talk to Echo And The Bunnymen, to Simple Minds... these are the bands that are touring, we're not bored by it. This is not a penance."

But non-stop touring can make you lose your bearings; there's a danger of being sucked into the American way, unable to assess what's happening to the band.

The Edge: "Touring has a bad effect on us when we're not being stimulated by it any more. But with this new LP it's a challenge to reproduce and we're finding the whole idea of being on the road artistically demanding again.

Bono: "The thing about being on the production line, going through the motions – and it's a great criticism of me as a performer – is that whenever the performance is sagging I'd throw the proverbial stick of gelignite into the audience and it would completely freak the band.

"I've had to face firing squads from the rest of the band on late-night phone calls. I would wish not to do that, but it was my frustration with the onstage environment, my feeling that a performance should

"We're not bored by touring. This is not a penance": Bono down under, September 1984

REX FEATURES

In Australia, September 1984: (l-r) Adam Clayton, Larry Mullen Jr, The Edge and Bono

never be boring, that led me to do that."

He likens the banner waving, the speaker-stack clambering, to an artist's bold strokes. I just saw it as pompous, signifying delusions of grandeur.

"It came from the opposite emotion; it was done out of insecurity. A fear that the music would not stand on its own."

There must be a more honest way of expressing that emotion.

"Yes, that's what we've got to find; I'm not sticking up for myself. We were coming from Dublin, hardly the rock'n'roll capital of the world. We were putting our shoulder to the door and we developed this muscle, this aggression. Eventually the door opened, but we were still there going bang! Wallop!"

Later he will correct himself.

"By the way, I'm not giving this a whole 'father, forgive me for I have sinned' vibe. There was a side to U2 on stage that I liked, that I'll stand by. It's a spirit of abandonment that none of our contemporaries would allow themselves. I believe conservatism and the stiff upper lip of the English music press reacted against the sweat, the tears, the total thing of the group on stage.

"You think of the '50s and the '60s in the US and the white bands of the time, the Buddy Hollys with their shirts and smiles, and compare them to the black groups of the time, groups that you respond to. The very reason they were rejected by the establishment was because of the spirituality and the sexuality of it all.

"U2 were the same – it was all too much. The western way is to pick at things, to open little packages and go through the intellect."

THE UNFORGETTABLE FIRE, recorded away from the glare and remorseless grind of the business – first in the ghostly, cavernous ballroom of Dublin's Slane Castle and then in the local Windmill Studios – in a cautious way bespeaks a rebirth for U2. Ditching the dullard sameness of Steve Lillywhite at the controls, the group enlisted ex-Roxy wizard, ethnic charlatan and Paris recluse Brian Eno and his partner Danny Lanois to produce the album. The pairing has reaped benefits, away from the dull litanies of *October* and the routine agitpop of *War*, the group's introspective approach has led them to impressionistic landscapes, vast heartlands that their frantic rush into the rock'n'roll quagmire meant they had bypassed. Nothing is cut and dried on this LP. They've stepped back from the slamming lambast of *War* and touched the spirit and celestial wonder at the core of their music once more.

But there is an underlying suspicion that it amounts to little more than an experimental diversion, that the big, bold rock sound will soon surge forth again. Bono dismisses the suggestion.

"If you think there's a period where OD-ing on rock'n'roll has damaged the new record, then you're wrong. That is a record totally devoid of the tracks and techniques of rock'n'roll – which is why it's foxing half the USA even as we speak."

According to Adam, over the past five years "every band in this country had been on the phone to Brian Eno", but U2 was the only offer he accepted.

Bono: "All he'd listened to for three years was gospel music. It was the spirit in which it was made that attracted him to the group's music, the sense of abandonment."

Adam gets tetchy: "The question shouldn't be why we wanted to work with Eno but why he wanted to work with us, this pathetic little rock'n'roll band from Dublin who hadn't made a good record since *Boy*. He must have seen something there."

The soul/gospel parallel wasn't something I could see in U2.

Bono: "I could relate to it. People talk about the spirituality of U2, and I realised that was part of everyday life in black music. Indeed Jimi Hendrix was the wildest rock'n'roll performer, and Janis Joplin would love to have been black. I realised though we weren't rooted in black music, there was something in the spirit that was similar.

"With Eno we rediscovered the spirit of our music and a confidence in ourselves. The emphasis was on the moment in this recording, on the spontaneity. It's like that Irish tradition, the Joyce thing – when you're relaxed you're not inhibited. The recording atmosphere was very relaxed.

"Like 'Elvis Presley And America' was recorded in five minutes. Eno just handed me a microphone and told me to sing over this piece of music »

REX FEATURES

June 22, 1985: with just five more dates of The Unforgettable Fire Tour ahead of them, U2 play the Milton Keynes Bowl

ILPO MUSTO / REX FEATURES

that had been slowed down, played backwards, whatever. I said, 'What, just like that, now?' He said, 'Yes, this is what you're about.' So I did it and when it was finished there was all these beautiful lines and melodies coming out of it. I said, 'I can't wait to finish this.' He said, 'What do you mean "finish it"? It is finished.'"

The title *Unforgettable Fire* comes from an exhibition of paintings by the survivors of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, a Japanese art treasure which the group are trying to get shown in Dublin. It also applies to the ugly all-consuming force of heroin that was responsible for destroying a couple of Bono's friends.

"It informs the LP a lot more than people realise. It had a great effect on me. When your friend becomes a junkie he ceases to be your friend; he'll steal from you, he'll fight you."

Another undoubted influence is a lasting passion for the great Martin Luther King, first by way of the LP's lucid closing requiem "MLK" (perhaps the most moving vocal Bono has ever recorded) and secondly in the group's current hit single.

Bono: "I originally wrote 'Pride' about Ronald Reagan and the ambivalent attitude in America. It was originally meant as the sort of pride that won't back down, that wants to build nuclear arsenals. But that wasn't working. I remembered a wise old man who said to me, 'Don't try and fight darkness with light, just make the light shine brighter.' I was giving Reagan too much importance; then I thought, 'Martin Luther King, there's a man.' We build the positive rather than fighting with the finger."

"Pride" and "MLK" are also the most obvious representations of Bono's heartfelt Christianity on the record. Though *The Unforgettable Fire* relies more on atmospheric textures and fragmented images for its appeal, I wondered if a group with their professed beliefs, and having spent time in America and seen how Christianity is distorted and used by warmongers like Reagan, would like to show the alternative interpretation directly.

Bono: "I feel more secure and therefore not as defensive as I was about that. Again it's the western thing – the English bottle it up; on the Continent spirituality is much more open.

"The best thing I've learned about the aspect is to shut up about it. I'm so tired of words, having been to America and seen the faith industry. The three-piece polyester suits – those people frighten me.

"Wherever you look – in the Catholic church and Protestant church – you see flaws. You can't ever find purity or perfection, and we find ourselves becoming more and more distanced. We get flak from all sides, really heavy letters from people saying how can you believe this and do this."

The Edge: "Words are a very limiting medium. I don't think it's essential for us to say anything; these things come out best through the music."

A few years ago, in one of his high-minded manifestos, Kevin Rowland declared something about Dexys' Projected Passion Review "flaunting insecurities". U2 have always made the point that their music is a result of the special chemistry between the four personalities in the band. What I like about *The Unforgettable Fire* is that it has room for doubt and human frailty in its broad sweep.

Away from the studio, however, they seem to hanker after a monolithic sound. The faceless, emotionless rock noise beloved of Simple Minds, Big Country and Echo And The Bunnymen. They refuse to confront or question this responsibility, or the group's music, seeing it as a law unto itself.

Bono: "Sometimes when we're creating we get the feeling that we're actually channels for some creative thing that's happening. It's like writers sometimes say it's in the air, they literally just pull things down."

The Edge: "There's a whole backdrop to the moment of creation and we're just the last link in the chain. What it means is we don't arrogantly believe we are responsible for this wonderful sound or anything."

Bono: "I started reading the music press again recently. For a while I didn't, and I've noticed there are two definite types of musician who talk to the press. There are those who say, 'Listen to this wonderful music, aren't I great?' And those that say, 'Listen to this wonderful music, isn't it great?' We are definitely in the latter."

As U2 have grown, expanded with corporation-like efficiency, so too has their presentation and packaging of the music become inflated into portentous symbolism. Even the magnificent photography by Anton Corbijn on the new LP cover wears heavy on the product of a mere rock band. Again it calls forth images of past behemoths. The song remains the same?

The Edge: "The burnt-out castle is the end of a period. Think of the British Empire, think of the west. The golden hour is over, the thing that

> "I would like to see a united Ireland; I believe it is an island"

interests us about that is the faded glory and the creepers, the fact that there is new life getting in there."

Bono: "It was the antithesis of that Olympian thing you seem to be suggesting."

But you do go in for grand symbolism.

Bono: "But we don't use it in a destructive way. John Lennon's the one that started all that. It was a year listening to him that brought that out. He had a way with words, simple catchphrases, and making them mean something to a lot of people.

"With *Boy* and *October* I got flak because they were so abstract. So with *War* I decided to strip it right down. I listened to it for the first time the other day and there was some great songs there that you overlooked in your lousy review. For the first time I could see a strident quality in there that let me down. I could see how it might have sounded like a finger pointing, and of course we've never pointed a finger at anyone, apart from ourselves. That voice was very angry; I didn't realise that I was so tense."

The *War* album, which focused more or less on Ireland's troubles, was inspired by playing in America. I castigated it at that time for not doing anything that Stiff Little Fingers had not already done – repeatedly, and shoddily.

Bono: "It was only going to America that made us think about Ireland. You just don't think about it until you have people throwing money on stage during Bobby Sands' whole hunger strike thing. I thought that guy must be so brave, but why? Why be so brave? Why die? There's something not right about this. People were going, 'Yeah! You're Irish!'

"But these people were seeing everything in the black-and-white about Ireland and they didn't realise it was all in the grey. '*I don't know, I don't know what side I'm on/I don't know my right from my left or my right from my wrong*', as I had it in 'Two Hearts Beat As One'. But they know better now, I think, having met people since the LP. I think we've contributed to that understanding.

"I would like to see a united Ireland; I believe it is an island. People then say, 'Do you believe in a cause enough to die for it?' I believe in a cause enough to live for it. These people believe in taking others' lives away. I just can't agree with this whole 'If you don't agree with me I'll put a gun to your head' vibe. Having had a Protestant father and a Catholic mother, I know how grey it is. There are no sides."

Apart from speaking for CND in Ireland and playing one or two benefits (the money from their New York Christmas show will go to Amnesty International), the group are cagey about more direct political involvement.

Adam: "Although we can lend our support to things like CND, these things are all inherently flawed. The way we can best contribute to our time and our generation is just getting down to what we do, which is making records."

Bono: "That's why the idea of *The Unforgettable Fire* appealed to me, because it is a creative thing.

"There is a danger in being a spokesman for your generation if you have nothing to say other than 'help'. That's all we say in our music. It's never sort of, 'Yes folks, here we go, here's the plan.' It's always, 'Where's the plan?'"

> "We're not going to take our trousers off to get on the cover"

WHILE THE VIRTUES, even the possible triumphs, of the group and the *War* album are not in doubt, I still find its forced expression, the flexing of the rock music Bono talked about earlier, indicative of U2's steady route to... gulp... world domination. Perhaps *The Unforgettable Fire* is an LP unlikely to reap the full commercial success that could be theirs, but as another mammoth world tour stretches before them I wonder if the lure of a crusade is what entices them.

Adam: "I think we acknowledge that stagnation is the worst possible disease. You've got to be threatened and challenged to have an opinion. We didn't want to play the Marquee every night for the rest of our lives, because we knew that would damage our creativity and our music."

Bono: "There are a lot of easier ways of being big. Only now, after five pieces of plastic, are we having our first hit single. Had we wanted to be the new Beatles or whatever, you would have seen us far more in those papers. It annoyed me to see Paul Du Noyer, though I liked him and I liked his review of the album, saying that *Under The Blood Red Sky* was mopping up in the marketplace. We took our royalties right down so we could sell that record at cut price. Surely the one thing that's clear is that we're not going to take our trousers off to get on the cover. We're not going to bring out a music we don't like to be big in America."

It's true to say that U2 are a group without any direct tradition. It was a topic Bono broached in a recent edition of Dublin's *Hot Press* when he interviewed/had a protracted conversation in print with Bob Dylan. The punk explosion had not only freed them of the stifling legacy of '70s Who, Stones, Zeppelin et al, but had also cut them off from the valuable heritage of the '50s and '60s which only now are they becoming attuned to.

"We're lost in space in that respect. We became interested in areas of music – Irish, country, folk. The track on the LP 'A Sort Of Homecoming' is geographical, but I don't know where it's based. When I look at Van Morrison or Bob Dylan I'm in awe of their tradition, I'm jealous. We haven't got that, we aren't plugged into it."

Still, I counter, they have spawned a tradition of their own. When I first interviewed Bono he was decrying the number of "Johnny Rotten's bastard children roaming the streets", and though he now blanches when I throw the old quote at him, it was a valid point in the wake of punk's fag end of The Exploited, the UK Subs.

It would seem that now, four years later, with The Alarm, Big Country and a whole slew of Irish surrogates, that there is a lot of U2's bastard children roaming the streets – or at least the recording studios.

"If they've just gone out and copied U2 then they've missed the whole point of the group – we are about the individual and individuals," says The Edge.

Bono is emphatic. "Don't answer the question, you shouldn't. Basically, Gavin is saying what is the difference between U2 and Led Zeppelin? If we are to sit down here and try to sell him the answer to that question we become salesmen, and we're not salesmen, we make music.

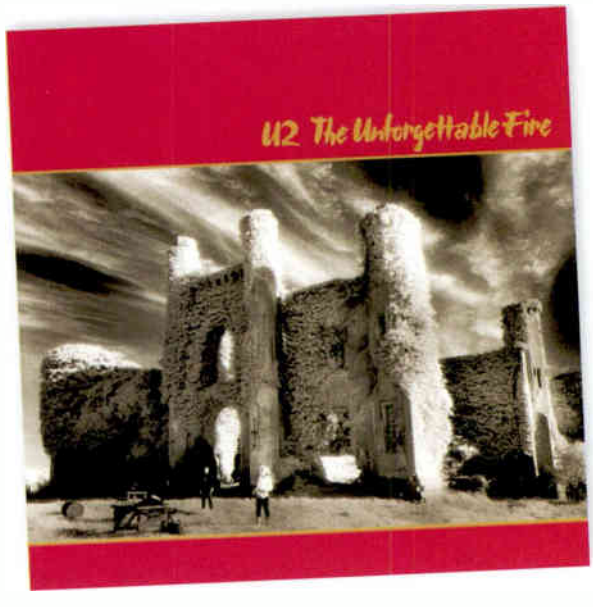
"I believe there is a rare spirit to this group, but I can't tell you why, that would be wrong. If you don't see that rare spirit then we've failed as a group as far as you're concerned."

I do see a spirit in U2, but I see it falling between two stools, the enlightenment and resource of *Unforgettable Fire*, and the possibility that another plunge into the endless touring cycle will drain it, smother it. So I must press the point.

"If you'll excuse me, and with all due respect, that is the sort of question that I don't think we should answer. This is what we're trying to get away from. We're trying to make a few songs, make the records deep and get away from this whole cosmic taking on the world and the music industry and our place in it. Why is music so competitive, Gavin? Just because there's a Top 10 and people see it every week, it's as though it's become a big competition. Why can people not just see our music as part of something else?

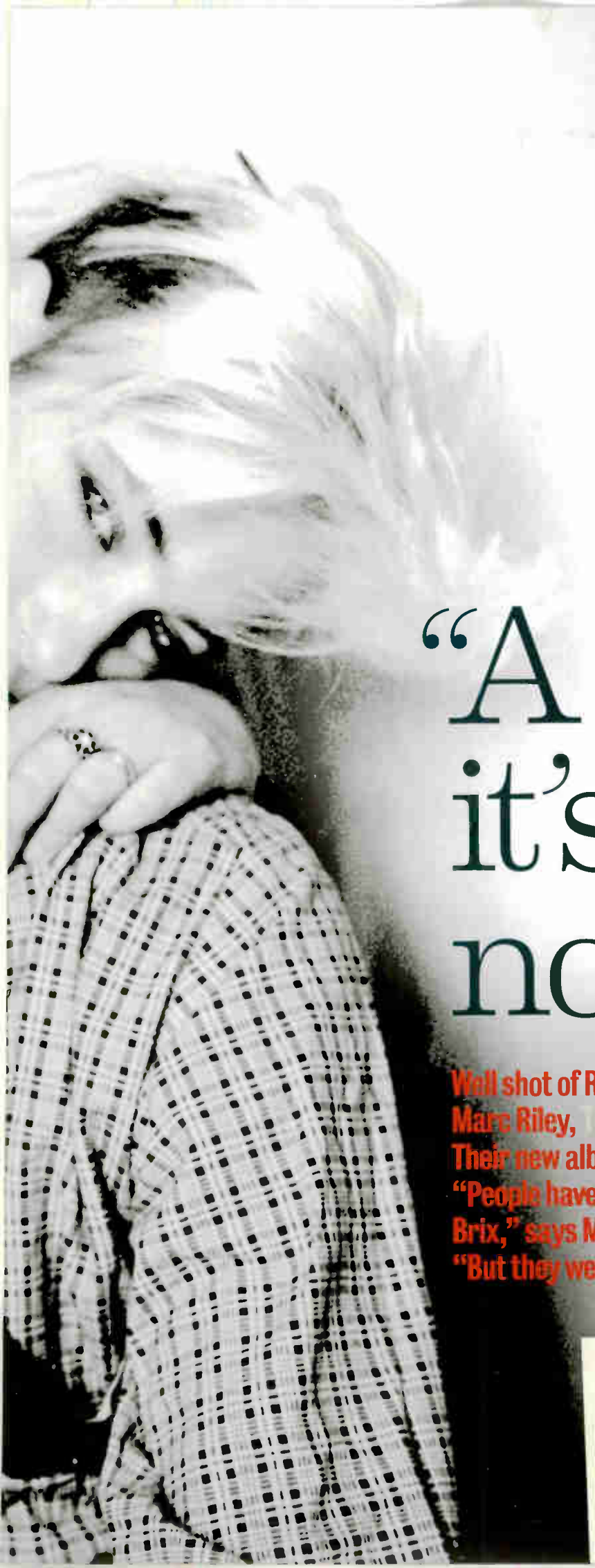
"I'm scared of the responsibility of standing in that space," said Bono in the days before he was feted by cheering crowds all over the globe.

Sometimes a little fear in music is not such a bad thing. *Gavin Martin* •



Brix Smith & Mark E Smith: met in Chicago in April 1983, tied the knot in Manchester three months later

LISA HAUN / GETTY



"A lot of it's about nowt"

Well shot of Rough Trade and "flappy mong" Marc Riley, THE FALL are on their way back. Their new album even displays a poppy side. "People have been trying to connect it with Brix," says Mark Smith of his new wife/guitarist. "But they were songs we had anyway."

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"I WENT TO SEE The Fall in Chicago and they were just... the best band I ever saw. Really good musicians and no fashion or image. Nothing to get in the way of the music. It was really hard. And so much stamina. And even though I didn't know the songs, it was like... the best show I ever saw.

"I went with a girlfriend... we were in a band together. During the concert my girlfriend met some man and left me, so I was there by myself and I was wandering around like a little waif and I ran into Mark at this bar downstairs and we just started... talking."

"Arguing," corrects Mark.

Arguing?

"Well, I made some comment to him like it was the best gig I ever saw but the lyrics irritated me. They were so good, but I couldn't understand them. I couldn't understand the accent. And the words going together were such non sequiturs for me at the time. It was brilliant but it was driving me crazy trying to figure it out... which is something you shouldn't try to do anyway."

> "We were in a bad way. No money, no support, huge debts..."

THEY MAKE A charming couple. Brix Smith is small, blonde, very American and engagingly sociable, with a slightly offbeat humour – Cyndi Lauper with brains. Brix plays guitar and composes songs with The Fall.

Mark E Smith is the original perverse northern sod: give him a key and he'll wind you up. Mark is singer and boss cat with The Fall and writes lyrics that come spitting out at you like the desperate last stand of a Thompson gunner and never fail to intrigue audiences and give reviewers headaches.

Mark and Brix got married first and pitted their artistic talents later. This was some time after guitarist Marc Riley had been ejected from the band and wasn't a move designed to make way for Mrs Smith. It doesn't stop people drawing their own conclusions, however... There is, after all, a bad tradition of wives in groups.

"Nepotism, yeah," says Mark. "Prejudices are gonna happen. It's already happened. All the time. But basically it's nobody's fucking business, being married, know what I mean? Basically, she's a guitarist and that's all there is to it."

Was there any resentment from audiences about the departure of Marc Riley?

"No. Don't think anyone noticed. Except it was a lot easier on the ears once he went.

"You just didn't see this big flappy mong walking around the stage distracting everybody's attention. Saved a lot of money on equipment as well."

"Oh, he was really nice to me," says Brix. "No hard feelings and all that. The two camps should just declare peace and get on with their business."

"I haven't declared war."

Well, someone declared war. The bombs were sure flying a few months ago. Mark insists that The Fall were changing. Mark, whose dictatorial approach to The Fall is well known, now has someone not only prepared to argue with him, but relishes it. Goaded on, Mark has reacted with an unprecedented burst of artistic passion and energy that has revived him completely following a depressing year in 1983, when he admits he came close to folding the band. For a second there, for Godsake, it looked like they might have a hit single with the quirkily sardonic 'C.R.E.E.P.'.

"'C.R.E.E.P.' is smart, brainy," concedes Mark graciously. "A lot of people said they thought it would be a hit, but I never did. To me it was just a rant. I never consider anything we do potential hits."

It's fairly bright, though...

"Yeah, but it's got a lot of big words in it. That makes a difference nowadays. The important thing was that it got the name of the group flung about a bit."

The burning question of the day, however, is who is "C.R.E.E.P." about?

"It's bits of things. A lot of people think it's about them. They played it on *Round Table* and Richard Skinner goes, 'This is about The Smiths.' I rang up Radio One, me. I says, 'Where d'you get this from?' I said, 'You bloody say a retraction.' AND he had to say it."

Why did they think it was about The Smiths?

Brix: "We never found out. I think it's Morrissey's paranoia that perpetuated the rumour. On 'Kicker Conspiracy' they thought Mark was saying, '*Kick out, kick out Morrissey.*' But we've nothing against him. Nothing whatsoever."

So you know him?

Mark: "Used to."

Not a good friend, then?

"Not an enemy either."

IN JANUARY THE Fall were at their lowest ebb. They walked out of their deal with Rough Trade. Mark found he couldn't write any more, they were broke and their support seemed to be diminishing.

"Me writing was getting so dense and complex when we were with Rough Trade... I started getting a writer's block towards the end of last year. They were screwing us up so much... so we left Rough Trade and ambled about. It was like, I'd rather retire than stay with Rough Trade."

That bad, eh?

"In an artistic sense, yeah. When you're skint and dealing with a load of bleedin' dickheads, what can you do? We were in a bad way. No money, no support, no nothing... huge debts, blah blah."

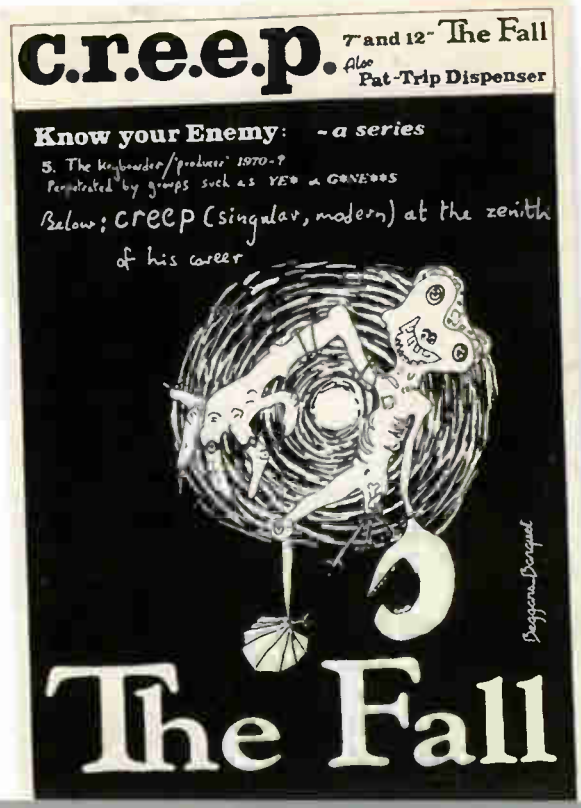
Suddenly and dramatically he dumps the terse northern accent and launches into a wholly unexpected bout of Italianese.

"That's why when I see 'C.R.E.E.P.' I could keess the song. I see 'C.R.E.E.P.', I keess eet."

He offers no explanation for this extraordinary outburst, other than the fact that the group instinctively knew it was a song they had in storage for a rainy day (it was written at the time of the *Perverted By Language* album) and could pluck it out to restore them to public favour when the need arose. The need had clearly arisen.

"People have been trying to connect it with Brix, but 'Oh Brother' and 'C.R.E.E.P.' were songs we had anyway. Believe it or not, we used to do 'Oh Brother' in 1978; used to do that before we even brought a record out. It was a bit different then, though; it was a bit Bo Diddleyish. It's only on this LP that Brix has really come into it with the guitar and stuff. Brix is a great guitar player, but the guitar isn't even on those two singles."

At one point it looked as though they might sign with Motown. The idea of The Fall on Motown is scarcely credible, but Mark and Brix swear it's true and were talking about £46,000 advances. In the end a Motown big boss in America turned them down, saying, "We see no commercial potential in this band whatsoever."


c.r.e.e.p.
7" and 12" The Fall
Also
Pat-Trip Dispenser
Know your Enemy: - a series
5. The keyboarder/producer 1970-?
Perpetrated by groups such as VEX & GONEBOYS
Below; creep (singular, modern) at the zenith of his career
The Fall

"Prejudices are gonna happen": Mark E Smith on the appointment of his wife Brix as The Fall's new guitarist

"The funny thing was this guy at Motown asked for some of our old stuff he could listen to and the only thing I had was *Hex Enduction Hour* and the first line on that is, '*Where are the obligatory niggers?*' I thought, 'When they hear that, we've had it'... we were prepared just to pack it in. We weren't gonna go around pleading... bleedin' ell. We've never done that. Never will."

Happily, Beggars Banquet came in with an offer they couldn't refuse (or something) and Mr and Mrs Smith clearly see it as a brave new dawn for the band. In Mark's estimation the new album is "bleedin' great" and "five times better than *Perverted By Language*. I like the way the tracks are arranged. All the rock songs on one side... and the rest on the... other..."

Sure, Mark.

Brix is certainly enjoying herself with The Fall. She's overcome her nervousness and worry that the rest of the band would resent her (they don't, they all think she is fab) and is contributing a lot of material ("Godbox" was one of her songs). And she's still drooling over Mark's lyrics.

"When I studied Mark's lyrics it blew my mind. Great poetry, let alone lyrics. You can just dig, dig, dig into it rather than just '*She loves you, yeah yeah yeah*'. I heard 'Slates' and it didn't leave my turntable for two weeks."

Ah, but what about the obliqueness, Mark? The fact that most people haven't a clue what you're on about much of the time...

"Oh, I don't know... what can you say?"

I don't know, I'm asking you.

"It's all there. It's just a matter of bringing it out. It's not a matter of me producing it better or taking elocution lessons – it's just a matter of bringing it out. You probably hear the lyrics better live than on records anyway. It's the atmosphere, isn't it?

"It's funny, 'cos in the last two days I've been sat down with this bloke from Berlin who's gonna write a book... collate a book of Fall lyrics... and some of the things he thought I was saying was quite different to what I was really saying. But you never think about that when you're singing. You just think, 'Don't make it too obvious.'

"And any of our lines is worth 10 of anybody else's. There's 10 times more words in there. This is part of the problem. It's not due to the fact that I can't talk properly.

"I think people pick up on the atmosphere... it's no big deal. A lot of the stuff is about nowt. Some of the interpretations this bloke had on these songs were great – much better than what I wrote."

It doesn't matter that people draw all sorts of weird and wonderful conclusions from what you write?

"No. It makes me laugh."

Perverse bugger. *Colin Irwin* •

ALBUMS REVIEW 1984

The Fall The Wonderful And Frightening World Of
BEGGARS BANQUET

Hardly The Fall go pop – but almost. By their own distinguished standards this is probably their most "commercial" record to date; though, of course, The Fall will never be an easy band to decipher. Many in this office will argue that they'll always sound like a '78 garage-punk band demoing sessions for the John Peel show, but really they deserve a far higher rating than that.

OK, so a Fall album of '84 mightn't sound too far removed from some of their first records, but it also sees them moving into dreamier, less abrasive territory. Mark Smith is still a madman whose fractured visions of life are often coloured by paranoia and delusion, and sometimes he can be too obtuse for his own good, but it's clear that things have changed radically in The Fall camp since our last encounter.

Those in the know single out Brix (Mrs) Smith as being responsible for their new, lighter countenance, and it's certain she's a lot more convinced of pop's value than her spouse. Sharing lead and rhythm guitar with Craig Scanlon, she adds zest to their rumbling, repetitive guitar chords, intrigue into this erstwhile bastion of masculinity.

Songs like "2 x 4" and the new single "Slang King" are still characterised by traditional dagger-sharp Fall drumbeats and dissonant bass chords, but they've been spiked with Brixa's subtle infiltrations. Gavin Friday of The Virgin Prunes contributes another dose of new blood, guesting on the vocals of "Copped It" and "Stephen's Song", and with all titles boasting band co-authorship, it's clear that The Fall is working more as a democratic unit than it has in the not-too-distant past.

It's still Mark E's show, but with Brixa's mellowing influence he's loosened his grasp of the reins and the results are stunning. The Fall are an acquired taste, but that's no excuse for ignorance.

Helen Fitzgerald, MM Oct 13

BLEDDYN BUTCHER

Eurythmics: Orwell, it could have been worse

ALBUMS REVIEW 1984

ALBUMS

Eurythmics 1984 VIRGIN

War Is Peace, Freedom Is Slavery, Ignorance Is Strength, and this soundtrack LP with the logo of Radford's *1984* on its cover is not the soundtrack of the film. Not the new Eurythmics LP, and not the film's music. So what is it?

Well, it's not another disaster in the vein of the last not-the-new Eurythmics LP – (Don't) *Touch* (With A Barge Pole) *Dance* – but neither is it the masterpiece that Dave and Annie seem to think on the evidence of last week's cover story. But then the soundtrack project has always been most dear to any artist's heart.

The perils of interpreting Orwell's novel has already been just about successfully negotiated by David Bowie on *Diamond Dogs*, so breaking new ground this isn't. Second, partly to do with that very LP, 1984 is a good deal further down the road to clichedom these days – in fact, last seen it had broken through the wall at the bottom and was still going. Maybe at one time you could have got away with a vocoder coda chanting "*1984*" in cold mechanical tones, now it's definitively CORNY.

With only two actual songs, "Sexcrime (1984)", the one with the offending vocoder, and "For The Love Of Big Brother", it comes down to mood music. There's two moods here; take your pick, epic or plaintive, mate. Problem number three is that the line between being epic and sounding septic is thinner than a layer of celluloid. There is, I'm afraid, more than one moment when all this sounds a little Jeff Wayne, especially on "Doubleplusgood", where a clipped newsreader voice is countered against stirring themes and a chorus of "*Plusgood, Doubleplusgood/ Plusgood, Doubleplusgood*".

Some moments, a great arrangement on the discordant piano and strangled scat of "I Did It Just The Same", but doubleplusgood? Not exactly.

Don Watson, NME Nov 17

Alison Moyet "Alf" CBS

As the blue dawn pours in through the shutters, Alison Moyet stares from the cover of her first solo LP with a look that immediately signals something is wrong. There's a suspicious glint in those irregular hazel eyes that the grainless perfection of the airbrush finish can't quite sandblast smooth. The last defiant flash before the gloss closes over her face says: "Are you sure I'm doing the right thing?"

"*Alf*" – signed by CBS, sealed in quotation marks and delivered by Alison Moyet. Signed, sealed, delivered, but who? There seems to be some uncertainty here as to the identity of this "Alf", now that she's encased in the inverted commas of the product.

Back when Alf and Alison were one and the same and half of Yazoo, she sang of heartbreak and doubt, but with a sound that sprang from an inner conviction. It was this, more than anything, which distinguished Yazoo. At a time when electronics were associated increasingly by fragile boys paddling in piddling traumas, Yazoo's hooks were slung by this lumbering figure of a woman, who seemed to breathe a life of pain into the most elemental romantic scenarios. If she recognised weakness, her sound was one of strength, bleeding towards cruelty.

Now, despite the bluster of "Love Resurrection" and "All Cried Out", the high profile and her picture on the cover of her own LP, she sounds all the more introverted – ready to huddle up inside the warm soul/funk of Swain and Jolley's arrangements. From the outside there's a promise that in "Twisting The Knife" or "Where Hides Sleep" something might break through the gloss, but at the core there's a hollow. This is Alison pretending to be "Alf". For any interpretive singer, the song's grain is the texture of its singer's personality. Sade will never sound convincing because her songs are projected against the countless *Face* spreads that we saw before we heard her voice. She can sing "*hungry but we won't give in*" with the best will in the world, but all she'll call up is the image of a gaggle of models in a small Parisian hotel room, grumbling about their starvation diets and despairing of ever attaining that anorexic look. Helen Terry, well, she still just sounds like the born sidekick.

Of the current female singers, Alison was the only one with the strength of character to sound convincing. Here it sounds like too many record company questions and marketing suggestions have shaken her idea of herself. She looks out from behind the cover. She's not sure – and it shows. *Don Watson, NME Nov 10*

WHAM! Make It Big EPIC

Let's start with Barry White. Now there was a man that I loathed. At the height of his success, I used to watch his videos in mounting disbelief as he, dripping in extravagance, lumbered around grunting his trite love songs to skimpily dressed women lying around a massive swimming pool. To me, Barry White personified crass with a capital C.

Ten years later, I now know what some of my friends at the time were trying to persuade me: Barry White created some brilliant records. Devoid of all those cliched images, he now stands on his music, and his music alone, as a great songwriter.

So how will we, in time, judge the pop music being made today? Without their crass statements and shallow credibility, will Spandau Ballet suddenly be recognised as a major talent? Duran Duran as masterful composers? And what, then, of Wham!, currently Britain's most popular group and possibly the most reviled?

It remains to be seen, but somehow I doubt if this music will

LJ VAN HOUTEN / REX

last. It is too synthetic and transparent. It rings hollow, without invention or mystery. This new Wham! LP does nothing but reinforce the idea that George and Andy are simply producing music that will sell, not writing music that is naturally its own. Just as they clumsily appeared with their early white-boy raps to fill a gap, so now they ditch that for what they think will sustain their success. They should have called it "The Art Of Pandering".

On that level, then, they have succeeded brilliantly. The music is loud, simplistic and vulgar. It has no foundation. If you stripped away one part, the whole song would come crumbling down, around their ears.

Of course, Wham! have now moved away from writing their "socially aware" songs. And it would be stupid to condemn them for that. They weren't exactly novel ideas, and writing songs about the working classes doesn't automatically make you talented. Just look at how Springsteen can release the weakest LP of his career and get away with it simply because he writes about the lot of the working man.

George Michael now writes songs about love. Either being in love or wishing you were. He seems to have a funny attitude to it. Women are either the harbingers of eternal happiness ("Wake Me Up..." and "Freedom") or callous cruel bitches who steal all your money ("Everything She Wants" and the cringeful "Credit Card Baby"). It's all surface stuff, boy meets girl, etc; reflections on adolescent emotions written and performed in the mock style.

"*All I know is all I see*," he sings in "Credit Card Baby", and George Michael knows an awful lot. For many people, Wham! are despicable because of the way they project themselves, itself a great clue to their natures and way of music making. Smug, arrogant and without a care in the world. I'm past the point of being offended by this conceit. At least it isn't as hypocritical as Gary Kemp's Labour-card policy when his group and their image is so obviously Tory-minded.

What springs to mind is how boring and predictable the Wham! operation is. They act as pop stars did when they were growing up, and the annoying thing is that the generation who will come up behind Wham! will act in exactly the same way.

Thankfully, I'll still have my Barry White records. *Paolo Hewitt NME, Nov 10*

Insanely catchy: Prince at the Spectrum in Philadelphia, November 24, 1984

SINGLES REVIEW 1984

SINGLES

Prince And The Revolution

I Would Die 4 U WEA

Prince is a scream, of course; his every gesture perfectly manicured, designed to enhance his legend as some exotic creation, beyond conventional emotional intercourse, a sensibility so rarefied, so elevated, it remains beyond the grasping embrace of mere mortals.

In this he reminds me oddly, but increasingly vividly, of Bryan Ferry. Like Ferry, he has an acute understanding of the vocabulary and mechanics of pop and soul and how they might best be manipulated to enhance their own images. Bowie has done this too, of course, but never without sounding convincingly phoney, which has bothered him less than Ferry – an eternal worrier – and, I suspect, Prince.

The latter, despite his cartoon narcissism, is delighted by his perceived public persona and, like Ferry – and unlike Bowie – has no sense of humour about himself; he's unintentionally a parody of his own imagination. None of this vague theorising, of course, makes "I Would Die 4 U" anything less than a winning record. The chorus is so insanely catchy, you'd be mad not to fall for it, while the arrangement fizzes brightly, setting whirling synth lines against brazen rhythm guitar, with Prince's voice waltzing through the spaces between the nudging musical climaxes. Probably the nearest thing this week to a record that I'll be listening to again. *MM Dec 1*

Band Aid

Do They Know It's Christmas? MERCURY

The reaction of defiant cynics to this all-star Band Aid extravaganza has been predictable. They've already churlishly dismissed "Do They Know It's Christmas?" as an opportunist trick, turned by Bob Geldof in an attempt to revive a spectacularly flagging career, a crass exploitation of a terrible natural catastrophe by a fading star desperate for publicity. In the circumstances, this verdict is simply cruel. Geldof has inevitably found himself back in the headlines (see our own cover this week), but syrups off to the chap: it was his initiative, after all, that pulled this ambitious project together, and his ubiquitous media presence over the last seven days hasn't obscured or deflected from the plight of the people this record was designed to help. He's entitled to some congratulation, and if he gets his face all over the papers, it's for a cause that no one could seriously claim isn't worthwhile.

Inevitably, after such massive publicity, the record itself is something of an anti-climax, even though Geldof's sense of universal melodrama is perfectly suited to this kind of epic musical manifesto. Midge Ure's large-screen production and the emotional vocal deliveries of the various celebrities match the demonstrative sweep of Geldof's lyric, which veers occasionally toward an uncomfortably generalised sentimentality that threatens to turn righteous pleading into pompous indignation. On the other hand, I'm sure it's impossible to write flippantly about something as fundamentally dreadful as the Ethiopian famine. *MM Dec 1*

John Lennon/ Sean Ono Lennon

Every Man Has A Woman's Heart / It's Alright POLYDOR

Paul McCartney With The Frog Chorus

We All Stand Together PARLOPHONE

John tends to sound a bit house-trained on trite pronouncements like this. Most likely he composed it while baking one of the famed Dakota loaves. Little Sean's B-side is an unbearably cute appeal to tousled sleepyheads the world over to wake up, "'cos *everything's gonna be alright*". Listen carefully and you'll just hear his mum threatening no pocket money in the background. John's old art-school buddy, meanwhile, sinks into a swamp to promote the animation biopic of Rupert Bear. *NME Nov 17*

EBET ROBERTS / GETTY

"Real weirdos"

Meet ZZ TOP, a blues band for the video age. Two-thirds good ol' boys, guitarist Billy Gibbons is an anomaly: an arts patron and electronic musician not always at home in the band's world of neon and beer. "So few bands are aware of what American culture is about," he says, en route to a topless place.

— NME NOVEMBER 17 —

HOUSTON, OCTOBER: THE monsoon season in this blandly corporate boomtown. I descend through hot storms over a chrome metropolis built on flat sand and oil deposits, all hopes of snaring the bearded boogiemen of ZZ Top in their appropriate Texan climate rent apart by vicious cracks of lightning. Visions of boiler suits and souped-up stock cars with mad whale-tail fins against deep-blue sky are washed away in the relentless rain. ZZ Top will be indoors, watching TV, thawing out frozen tacos.

Who knows what to expect of these genial loons on their home turf? I'm looking to them to subvert rock'n'roll America, but they may just be part of Houston's boom: slick businessmen with a neat line in self-merchandising. (There must be ZZ Top dolls by now.) Doubtless they'll wish to be photographed in the boardroom of ZZT Enterprises.

"*Lord, get me out of Houston town,*" wailed soul man Ted Taylor. Everything was going wrong for Ted, but not for our good friends of the chin-blisters. ZZ Top have dwelt in the East Texan city for 15 good years and show no signs of hotfooting it out. In many ways it's an ideal place for them, a city quite removed from the entertainment empires on the coasts and free of specific rock traditions.

Houston has grown, but grown so fast that things are still loose enough for a cartoon celebrity like Billy Gibbons to have served two years on the trustees' board of the city's Contemporary Arts Museum. The money is new, so a generation or two can elapse before a class structure sets in hard.

The latest issue of *Vanity Fair*, a kind of highbrow American *Tatler*, takes a gossipy peek at this trendy new mecca with its Philip Johnson 'scrapers, its outdoor Dubuffet sculptures, and its subsidised ballet. In amongst the heiresses, the oilmen and the gallery owners is the voice of one B Gibbons ("Rock Star")...

"Despite its size, the feeling, the thread that binds the whole of it together, is blue-collar. This is not a purely sophisticated city by any means. You've got the ship channel and the dockworkers and the refineries. The business community is firmly planted with both feet in that territory. You never really get away from an earthier kind of feeling."

The idea is to observe ZZ Top – along with Motörhead and the Blue Öyster Cult, one of metal's more engaging anomalies – in their own backyard. Their album *Eliminator*, a hi-tech, rocket-ignition overhaul of their bastard hard blues, has been sitting seemingly immovable in our national Top 10 for two months. No one seems quite sure what propelled it up there; without a hit single, it looks positively freakish. »

PAUL NATKIN / GETTY

February 8, 1984: ZZ Top at the Metro Centre, Rockford, Illinois - (l-r) Dusty Hill, Frank Beard, Billy Gibbons

It's a remarkably good record, of course, containing the mighty "Gimme All Your Lovin'", which achieved in three minutes and 59 seconds what dear old Status Quo have been striving to do for 20 whole years. Other spiffing riffs boasted by this fine disc include the video masterworks "Legs" and "Sharp Dressed Man", plus the mirthsome "TV Dinners" and "Got Me Under Pressure" (with its unbeatable line "*She likes cocaine/And flipping out with great danes*").

It's still raining the next day as I climb aboard a limo and head for the "health spa" which ZZ Top have recently acquired in order to limber up between tours. An in-car TV box reports flooding in the north-west of the city. We glide past new housing settlements with names like Pecan Grove and White Oak Bayou on long, flat roads stretching off the highway, past Pentecostal churches and cowboy surplus stores. A sign for Humble Mobile Homes comes up: humble indeed, though it was Humble Oil that later became the giant Exxon corporation. ZZ Top's outrageously funky "Cheap Sunglasses" booms from the tape deck. "That dude pick the shit outta the bass," remarks Fred the black driver.

The ZZ Top "spa" turns out to be fairly humble itself, though decorated in garish bordello wallpaper. A plastic imitation set of Mr T's excessive gold neckwear adorns one wall. It must be said that as we enter the spa the fellas are not exactly utilising the impressive array of Nautilus equipment on display. Nor do they exactly resemble three Arnie Schwarzeneggers. But then old Conan's pectorals would doubtless interfere with the subtle licking action which characterises Top's grooviest platters.

El primo licksman Gibbons looks about as unlike a beefy 10-gallon Texan as anyone could. In his blue pinstripe suit and white-shirted paunch he is more like a Hasidic Jew in a baseball cap; a tiny pigtail tickles the nape of his neck. Bassman and bearded double Dusty Hill is continually grinning a set of jagged little teeth and stroking his prodigious facial hair. His combination of Nike sweatpants, motorcycle boots and yellow sou'wester more than bears out his useful definition of "sharp dressed" as "anything I'm not wearing", and he strikes the eye as a jumble of car mechanic, hillbilly farmer and one of Snow White's seven dwarfs.

Gibbons and Hill have always struck me as the Morecambe & Wise of rock'n'roll, or least Morecambe & Wise crossed with the false-bearded Marx Brothers of *Duck Soup*, and in the flesh this is precisely what they are. As for fresh-faced drummer Frank Beard, his little leather legs are the one thing I note about this natty, reformed-wildcat golfer person. ("Rod Stewart by way of *American Gigolo*" is how Billy Gibbons once appraised him.)

Almost immediately, we repair to an almost inevitably Mexican restaurant, just two doors down on the same shopping lot, and while the culinary scene which ensues is not quite on the scale depicted in the gatefold sleeve of *Tres Hombres* – lashings of greasy cheese over guacamole and enchiladas – it's quite enough to nullify any strenuous exertions they may have managed in the spa. "This is purr-fect fer Zee Zee Tarp," drawls the laconic Beard, whose Southern acksint is simply total. "Work out for two hours and then destroy it all." He promptly digs into a large round of nachos.

Three iced teas are ordered for the Tops and conversation turns briefly to the subject of tolerable Mexican restaurants in London (Cafe Pacifico in Covent Garden earns their highest rating). From there it winds into more general feelings about the band's relationship with Britain. Gibbons speaks in a low, quiet voice.

"It's funny, because we waited so long to go to the UK. It was actually 10 years before our first appearance. Having found a nice little cult following, it was a very warm reception in the beginning, and yet so many things had changed in music that we were very uncertain about how a ZZ Top type band would go down in the UK, especially since the wave of new stuff in the late '70s. We were lucky to hit it just when a heavy metal thing was coming back – there was a slot we could sneak into."

I remark that *Eliminator* is a more metallic record than *Deguello* or *El Loco*. The guitars are revved up like the Corvette engine in the album cover's 1932 Coupe.

"We've always been car freaks," says Billy. "A guy came into Houston and recommended that we go with him to California for the National Drag Racing Championships, and not having been to one in a while, I really wasn't quite prepared for the magnitude and dynamics of a 2,500-HP nitroburning bomb. It was just like a rocket with wheels, it was so awesome. If there was just a way to get that sound and that feeling on stage and record, well..."

"Hot cars and rock'n'roll have always been synonymous," puts in Dusty rather prosaically. "They're already tied together..."

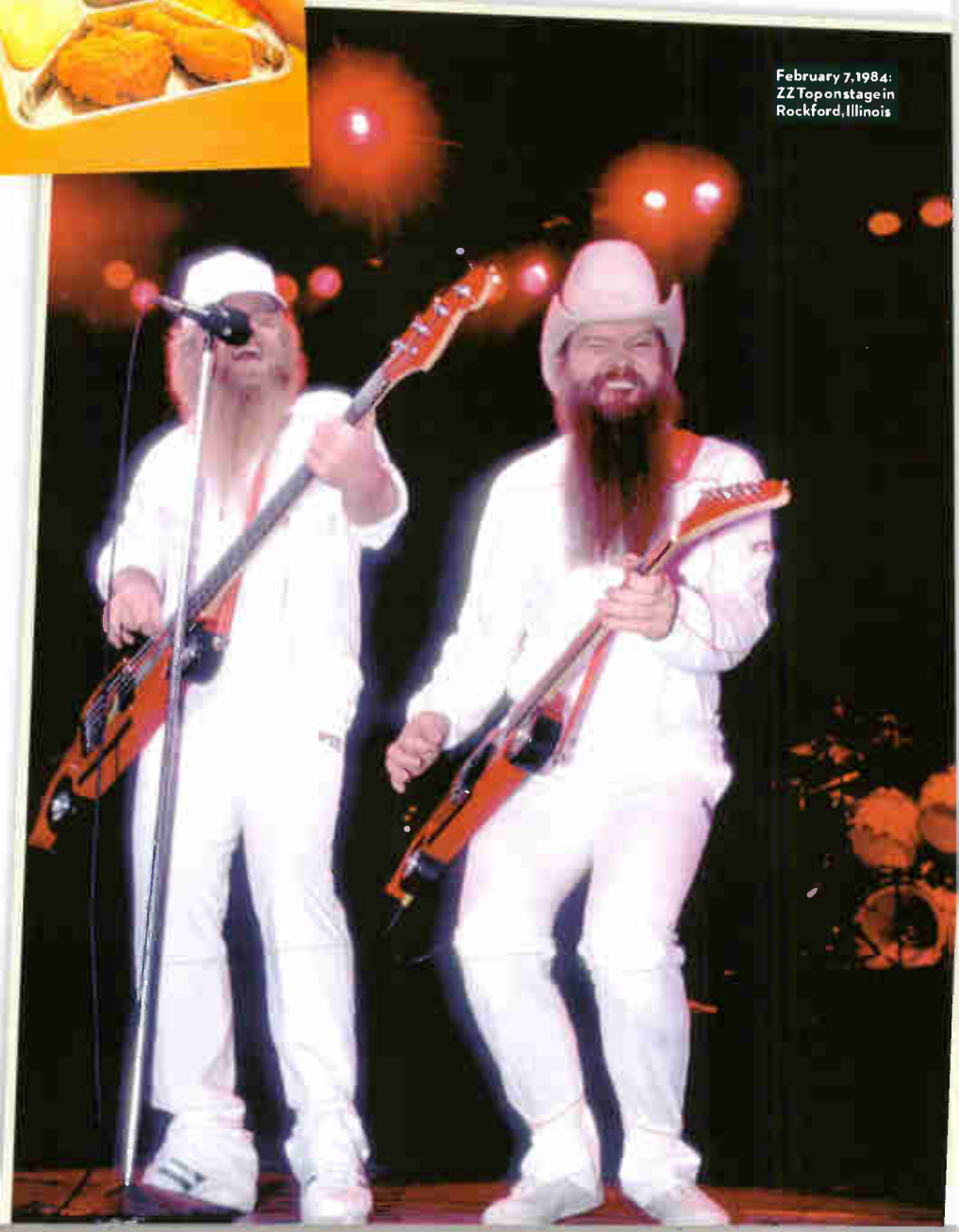
"Although Frank," counters Billy, "is suggesting that the next album feature the ZZ Top boat."

Has anything changed in these three over the course of 15 years? Were they the same merry pranksters in 1969?

"Ah'd swear they're wilder than they was ten years ago."

Will you never grow a beard, Beard?

"Ah cain't! Ah'm jist so far behand! Ah used to say I was too yerng, but after 12 years that stopped working. Then ah said it


February 7, 1984: ZZ Top on stage in Rockford, Illinois

PAUL NATKIN / GETTY

was doo to female thigh-burn, but I got married and ah cain't say that no more! So now I say ah'm jist too far outta the race."

Gibbons and Hill are quick to point how much money their hirsuteness saves them tie-wise, though Billy sometimes invests regardless. "There's a real hip little shop in Covent Garden called Robot, and they had the greatest string ties with skull-and-crossbones, which you just won't find in Texas. I said, 'I'll take 10.' The guy said, 'Why?'"

Billy Gibbons' grandparents were English, which part-way explains his abiding affection for our fair isle, and his old man was Freddy Gibbons, a pianist and society orchestra leader who came to Texas from New York on account of his wife's poor health. "I'm real glad he did, because being here we've all had to figure out what it is that makes Texas such a great place to put down musical roots. I suppose one of the reasons was that up until the '70s none of this convenient modern city living was available. Growing up in Texas, there just seemed to be so much time on your hands, and that was a factor – that plus the old tradition of the Texas gunslinger. In other words, if you didn't have a six-shooter you used six strings."

"There was also a big rhythm'n'blues thing here and in Dallas," says Dusty Hill, "and you couldn't help but have that seep into you." Dallas, 300 miles north-west of Houston, is hometown to Dusty and Frank. Well before Billy had gotten his first Gibson Melody Maker and Fender Champ amp, a 14-year-old Dusty was playing some very primitive bass there with such blues heavyweights of JR-ville as Freddie King and Lightnin' Hopkins.

WHAT FIRST UNITED ZZ Top, unbeknownst to each of them, was a late-night blues station operating out of Mexico on which, 300 miles apart, they discovered the likes of Jimmy Reed, Howlin' Wolf and T-Bone Walker. "Because he was from that high-society background," recalls Billy, "my dad didn't care for that jive stuff. It was the old story of the kid who wants to play rock'n'roll, y'know, and Dad says, 'Why are you playin' that stuff?' So the kid does it twice as heavy."

In Dallas, Dusty and Frank wound up together in a dubious combo known as Lady Wild & The Warlocks, the lady in question being a scouse siren of uncertain talents. On her ladyship's departure the Warlocks metamorphosed into the sub-psychedelic American Blues, noteworthy if only for the shocking-blue hair they sported as they gamely toured through the redneck wilds of Texas. (One of their showstoppers was called "Chocolate Ego".) In Houston, meantimes, Billy Gibbons had assembled the amazing Moving Sidewalks, an acid-garage band who today rank alongside ? & The Mysterians and the 13th Floor Elevators in the Texan enclave of punk ancestry. The Sidewalks' "99th Floor", a collision of Them's "Gloria" and the Elevators' "You're Gonna Miss Me", remains a pinnacle of '60s garage punk, a stabbing riff of Vox fuzz organ and tinny, needling guitar.

It was while the Sidewalks were touring with the Jimi Hendrix Experience in 1968 that JH blessed Billy Gibbons as "America's most promising young guitarist". The bigger influence, of course, was Cream, the original power blues trio. The irony of Texans rediscovering their own blues heritage via a bunch of limeys reared in desperately unsoulful places like Twickenham has been remarked on before; Top have in any case taken more than two steps from the blues since then. If their first album, released in 1970, was orthodox enough, the patented humour was already sneaking through on *Rio Grande Mud* (1972), in such unbluesy odes to Americana as "Chevrolet", "Bar-B-Q", and "Whiskey'n'Mama".

The subsequent twenty years have produced a veritable cornucopia of High Trash anthems: "Beer Drinkers And Hell Raisers", "Nasty Dogs and Funky Kings", "Cheap Sunglasses", "Groovy Little Hippy Pad" and many more. Along with The Cramps and The B-52's, ZZ Top have crafted some of the wittiest pop statements ever made about America.

It's here that a curious tension develops in the conversation. For while Billy is clearly desirous of minor pontification on musical/cultural generalities, the others equally clearly aren't. When I ask (seriously) about ZZ Top's humour, Frank and Dusty get good-ol'-boy humorous – "hey, humour's jist humour" – but Billy (the only really witty one) looks serious. So serious that he leaves the table. Somehow I sustain the line of enquiry.

In a way you're a kind of pop-art group, aren't you?

"You mean artsy-fartsy? Heh heh!!!" bawls Frank.

"Heh heh heh!!!" concurs Dusty.

I stare long and hard at the remnants of my guacamole.

"Dusty, you goin' to that party Saturday?" inquires Frank.

"I gotta go to my mother's birthday, so I'm gonna be outta town. But I need to git a costume for Hallowe'en next week."

"Ah wanted to go as y'all," cackles Frank.

Mercifully, Billy Gibbons drifts back into the room. I repeat my pop-art question. "I think that's a compliment," he says. "I don't think we've ever set out to present ourselves as the Talking Heads or anything, yet there are so few bands who are aware of what American culture is about."

"An' we're certainly not one of 'em!!" bellows Frank.

"Heh heh heh!!" Dusty bellows back.

Billy ignores them. "There's so little regionalism. There's this kind of glaze which has made the East Coast like the West Coast and Texas like Wyoming and everywhere else. It's hard to pinpoint little segments or sections that have some oddball thing you can play off."

I guess ZZ Top is a kind of oddball institution in itself.

"The entertainment level here in Houston is at such an ebb that we're real weirdos. Houston is not a showbiz town. I kind of enjoy the oddball attitude that is thrust on us. It keeps 'em guessing."

It is a little-known fact that among the projects Billy Gibbons undertook during ZZ Top's sabbatical of 1976-1979 was a commission to compose and record some ambient electronic music for an art gallery in Paris.

A little while after Frank and Dusty have taken off in their respective automobiles, Billy Gibbons proposes a visit to Rick's Cabaret, a "high-class titty joint" housed in a kind of neo-Vegas Palladian villa, sort of halfway between *The Best Little Whorehouse In Texas* and the Houston "encounter booth" where Harry Dean Stanton finds Nastassja Kinski in *Paris, Texas*. Since he is by no stretch of the imagination a priapic rock'n'roll pig, Billy looks distinctly out of place at Rick's: at worst, framed by clusters of G-strings and nipples, he is Benny Hill rather than David Lee Roth. Feeling the acute discomfort that only a 25-year-old English introvert could feel in such a temple of hedonism, I watch Gibbons being greeted by fellow Houston bigwigs, gorillas in suits and ostrich cowboy boots. I cannot decide whether to believe in this good ol' boy alter ego.

Back inside his limo, Billy turns and confesses his anger at Dusty and Frank: "You were asking a serious question and they were being real tiresome." Billy loves to talk, even if he loses himself in his own abstractions and has a strangely awkward way of searching out the right word. He's chuffed that people get far enough to take his humour seriously, and I think relishes the disparity between his own wide-ranging interests and the Top audience's narrower infatuation with boozy boogie. "I hate to draw dividing lines", he says, "but where does Muddy Waters meet Brian Eno?"

By the time we've arrived at the Gibbons abode, I've stopped listening to Billy's ruminations. Instead I'm staring in disbelief at the interior decoration. The house is constructed around one outsize room overlooking the swampy-looking Buffalo Bayou River and is filled with artefacts of seriously advanced kitsch: blue neon cacti, a mannequin mummy, a pair of chrome sheep. Everything else is merely tasteless.

> "I hate to draw lines, but where does Muddy Waters meet Brian Eno?"

Billy is reading my mind, or at least my expression. "Americans invent things that are fun, things that go from right-field conservative to the seediest left-field expression you can dream up, yet most of them are reactionary rather than visionary." He is about to say more when the doorbell rings.

A lawyer friend has shown up with the rest of an Elvis-style inner echelon of pals and it's time to play good ol' boy again. The lawyer chides him for taking me to Rick's and everyone is slapping him on the back, chuckling like kids. Time to make excuses and bid farewell, pausing only to glance back at this singularly odd fellow in his pinstripe suit, surrounded by urban cowboys.

The Benny Hill grin is a little crooked. *Barney Hoskyns* •

THE HISTORY OF ROCK

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Readers' letters

MM/NME JUL–DEC NME strike-stricken, Peel praised and Doublethink identified...

Industrial inaction

The sunshine that filtered through my window was as empty as a head waiter's smile. I tapped my badly bitten biro on top of my desk. The facts stood up in my mind big as boulders: the subscription had been paid over six weeks ago; confirmation had been received, yet the morning mailbag brought only air, dust and an old musty smell of canvas.

I tapped my biro again. I looked at my watch. I looked at the wall. I looked at nothing.

PHILIP MARLOW (Stephenson), Kaptagat, Kenya (*NME* Aug 4)

Last week I was in a state of depression because the *NME* was not printed. In a week's time, I will start my A-levels and I need some jovial sustenance. Whilst bypassing the *Mayfair*s, *Economist*s and *Private Eye*s, I noticed a vacant gap where this paper should have been. I left immediately, cursing everyone. Still downhearted, I watched *High Band* with Thomas Dolby. He played "Windpower", and what did I hear but "*There is no* NME" repeated a number of times. What a cruel blow!

PETER KOUKOULAIDES alias Peter Koukoulaides, Catford, London (*NME* Aug 4)

Last week I had to buy *Snoods*– the first and last time. Let's hope all's well this week.

RICHARD SCOTT, a worried man from Leeds (*NME* Aug 4)

Peel the noize

I note that the rumbling ulcer of anti-John Peel mail has reared its ugly head again. To see Peel as a "disillusioned hippy", or to castigate him because he doesn't play U2, The Wombles or whoever, is surely to miss the point. Peel's programme is a safety net for Radio One; he adopts an eclectic approach, encompassing soul, jazz, African, punk, reggae and other "minority" forms, as well as promoting the lesser-known mainstream artists.

The Smiths and Cocteau Twins are just the latest in a long line of bands who benefited from his benign enthusiasm. I would think that regular listeners are quite happy with this catch-all stance. Personally, I welcome his rejection of the noxious tribalism which has infected music over the past few years; it's surely worth suffering the current rash of Ovalteenies, Go West bands or Birthday Party clones he seems to favour.

Anyway, this letter isn't any different. What really got up my nose was the two "critics" of John Peel in your last issue. Is everyone at Cardinal College, Oxford, as much of a wanker as you, "Arkansaw Traveller"?

Does Mr Peel really deserve all those nasty remarks about his hair just because he doesn't quite like U2 as much as you do, Selma of Middlesex. I mean, I like U2 very much, but I wouldn't knock someone who didn't. People like Selma seem to lose their tempers far too easily when others fail to show the same adoration for their favourite pop groups.

All in all, I think JP is a decent sort who should keep broadcasting until he drops into his coffin, whilst you, Selma, should plug your narrow mind into an endless U2 tape loop and go jump into a vat of your own faeces, where you will probably bump into that arse wiping from Cardinal College, Oxford.

HUGE (WILLY) WILLIAMS, Noctorum, Birkenhead, Merseyside (*NME* Aug 4)

ANN CLIFFORD / GETTY

Wham! bad rap

Let's start with Paolo Hewitt. In 10 years' time, the Paolo whatsits of the world will open predictably derogatory reviews of albums by the big pop stars of the day with comments like: "Let's start with Wham!. Now there was a pair of lads..."

CRKYME, Forest Gate, London

That's just the problem, I won't be. –PH **(*NME* Dec 1)**

1984 and all that

Arthur Lee (Gasbag, 24 November) is right. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was not a prophecy. The book was written by Orwell as a warning. I know I'm being boring, but that was the whole point of the book and therefore the movie. Why was the movie released in 1984? Because that's how Sonia–wife of the late George–wanted it. Besides, it's a natty idea for Virgin to release it in 1984. But it doesn't matter when it was released. The warning is still there. If you don't think Orwell's vision is with us, just take a look at security surveillance cameras, the never-ending Middle Eastern wars and Doublethink (who wants to stay warm in winter and support the miners' strike at the same time?).

JOHN TINGWELL, London SW5

But where does the NME *come into all this? The Ministry Of Truth?* **(*NME*, Dec 1)**

Full of broadsheet

At least I have proof that working for *NME* can damage your health, or to be more precise, can turn your brains into friggin' scrambled eggs. As I was browsing through the *Guardian* the other day, I came across a short "rock" piece written by none other than your very own Barmy Hoskyns.

The following is a quote from the aforementioned passage: "This American quartet is funky successors (sic) to Led Zep's throne whose superb Who pastiche was recently a smash hit."

This was a reference to Van Halen and their single "Jump", would you believe. What the flipping heck he means by saying they "is funky successors to Led Zep's throne," who knows? I certain don't.

BERNIE 'CATALOGUE' TROUSERS, Liverpool 9 (*NME* Sept 8)

Miner disagreements

Justify your existence, Joe Strummer. Even Wham! are doing a benefit concert for the miners. Your music may now be boring, cliched and meaningless, but The Clash can still fill concert halls and make money for the miners, not American tours.

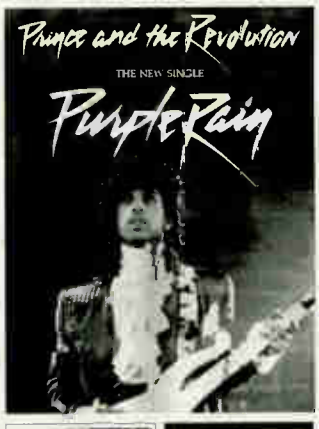
IAN MACGREGOR (*NME* Sept 15)

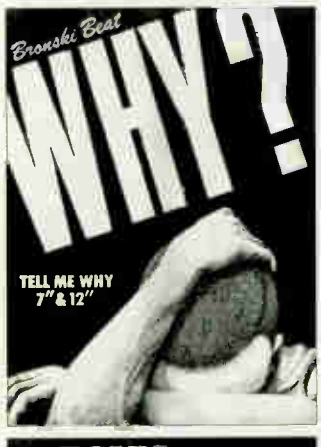
Frankly...

Is *Welcome To The Pleasuredome* this decade's *Frampton Comes Alive*?

M WHITE, London N19

More The Dark Side Of Mooning, *I would suspect...* **(*NME* Dec 1)**





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Coming next... in 1985!

SO THAT WAS 1984. It was really nothing.

Certainly, that's not it from our reporters on the beat. The staffers of *NME* and *Melody Maker* enjoyed unrivalled access to the biggest stars of the time, and cultivated a feel for the rhythms of a diversifying scene; as the times changed, so did they. While in pursuit of the truth, they unearthed stories that have come to assume mythical status.

That's very much the territory of this monthly magazine. Each month, *The History Of Rock* will be bringing you verbatim reports from the pivotal events in pop culture, one year a month, one year at a time. Next up, 1985!

NEIL YOUNG

A SEARCHING ENCOUNTER with the ungovernable songwriter. Who is waiting for David Crosby to clean up his act before playing with CSNY again. "The way I look at it, either he's going to OD and die or we're going to play together sometime. It's pretty simple. They all know how I feel."

REM

THE BAND RELEASE *Fables Of The Reconstruction*, and their enigma persists. "Michael gets criticised because people say they can't understand what it is he's singing," says drummer Bill Berry. "I'm glad we made the decision never to include a lyric sheet with the albums. That would be like going to the movies and getting the script to the film with your ticket."

KATE BUSH

NOW WITH A different dance teacher, Kate is ready for the new direction of *Hounds Of Love*. "I've never seen any point in repeating things you've already done before. Too many people sit and think, 'It'll just come to me,' instead of getting off their arses and going for it."

PLUS...

JESUS AND MARY CHAIN!
LIVE AID!
TOM WAITS!

FROM THE MAKERS OF **UNCUT**

THE HISTORY OF ROCK 1984

Every month, we revisit long-lost *NME* and *Melody Maker* interviews and piece together *The History Of Rock*. This month: 1984.

"When you say it's going to happen now/Well when exactly do you mean?..."

Relive the year...

THE SMITHS MADE A MAGNIFICENT DEBUT

GEORGE MICHAEL AND PAUL WELLER SUPPORTED THE MINERS

MICHAEL JACKSON BROUGHT *THRILLER* TO LIFE, WITH HIS BROTHERS IN TOW

...and U2, JAMES BROWN, THE FALL, ZZ TOP, NICK CAVE, VAN HALEN and many more shared everything with *NME* and *MELODY MAKER*

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